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Faith in Action for Social Justice

Dirty Secrets



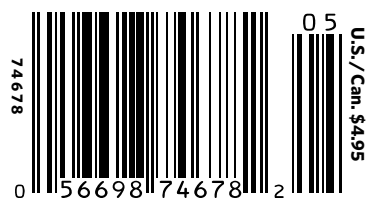
Our oh-so-polite
neighbor to the
north is leading
the world in
destructive
mining practices.
Pretty rude, eh?

PLUS:

50 years after
Vietnam

#BlackLeadersMatter

Fasting from
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"The effective struggle against global warming will only be possible with a responsible collective answer, that goes beyond particular interests and behavior and is developed free of political and economic pressures ... On climate change, there is a clear, definitive and ineluctable ethical imperative to act ..."

- Pope Francis
January 18, 2015



"A second key area where you are called to make a contribution is in showing concern for the environment. This is not only because this country, more than many others, is likely to be seriously affected by climate change. You are called to care for creation not only as responsible citizens, but also as followers of Christ!"

- Pope Francis
December 11, 2014



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OUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBOR to the north has a well-deserved reputation for civility and hospitality, not to mention great health care available to all. But a dirty secret has emerged: Some of the worst mining companies in the world are Canadian. In this issue of *Sojourners*, Canadian writer and Anglican priest Emilie Teresa Smith investigates the extensive harm Canadian mining firms have brought upon Indigenous people and the environment. If you thought the Keystone XL pipeline was the only blot on Canada's good character, its business model in exploiting mineral resources of developing countries is even worse.

While political partisanship in Washington, D.C., has obstructed meaningful reform of our broken immigration system,



churches on the border are having a direct impact on the people whose lives are on the line. David Cramer writes about Christian organizations in the Rio Grande Valley banding together to provide comfort, food, and shelter to undocumented families. Led by Catholic Charities in McAllen, Texas, the churches seek to serve, not to make a political statement, yet their compassion is attracting the attention of national media

and changing the conversation from political to humanitarian.

As sexual assaults on college campuses continue to stir national conversations, Lyndsey Christoffersen directs our attention to another place where sexual assault too often goes unnoticed: our churches. Examining the ways "modesty talks" and Bible stories can seem to endorse victim-blaming behavior, she calls the church to speak candidly about sexual sin in scripture and in our communities.

Susan Windley-Daoust also has a word for the church: Though we love to be a "voice for the voiceless," a renewed theology of the body means stepping aside and allowing people who live with disabilities to speak for themselves. ■

Letters

DAUNTING WORK

Thank you for Ryan Rodrick Beiler's "Pro-Israeli, Pro-Palestinian, Pro-Jesus" (March 2015). I just returned from the Israel-Palestine area, and I feel horrified wondering about the occupied state, which was so visible as I went through the Holy Land.

I visited organizations that promote a nonviolent solution, yet the work still seems so daunting when considering the reality of everyday life for Palestinians.

Suzanne M. Warner
Louisville, Kentucky

VIOLENCE AND TRUTH

In "A History of (Non)Violence" (March 2015), Lisa Sharon Harper provides important insights into how the word "violence" is sometimes misused. She's right. To call the Montgomery bus boycott "violence" because it created economic hardship for the bus company is a stretch. Her concerns also prompt me to see violence in the growth of Israeli walls that separate Palestinian homes from their crop land.

However, her lumping all police-involved shootings together, then lumping them with vigilante killings, is violence against truth. If we're to confront the tragedy of police-involved shootings, we must be careful enough to see them individually—and then

respond with discriminating precision to them individually. Truth is found not in facile generalizations or undisciplined demonstrations but in careful discernment.

William A. McCartney
Delaware, Ohio

STRENGTH AND FAITHFULNESS

Thank you for publishing David P. Gushee's "Tackling the Hard Questions" (January 2015). It was wonderful to read an admission that for centuries Christians have been judgmental and hurtful to people with same-sex attraction, creating a "human suffering problem within the very heart of the church," and that it's time for radical change in views and practices. He also strongly questioned the assumption that anything in the Bible—even what Gushee calls "the Big Kahuna" of Romans 1:26-27—really condemns homosexuality.

For people who believe everything written in the Bible is a guide for how to live, and yet see faithful love lived out between gay people, I'd guess these verses have been boulders to a view change. So it's great that Gushee takes apart Paul's language and the context to show that these verses may have a very different meaning. I'm especially glad Gushee wrote about the strength and faithfulness of LGBT Christians—and the

richness of having their relationships in our communities.

Naomi Thiers
Arlington, Virginia

EXPLOITING HOPELESSNESS

In "How to Overcome Evil" (December 2014), Jim Wallis covers the problems and politics that made such a thing as ISIS possible. He's quite right: ISIS did not just pop up out of nowhere.

From my own research, I learned that they are the product of the violence and confusion in the region—conditions that would make many of us willing to grasp at straws or at a terrorist group searching for a way out. I definitely don't support ISIS, a group using terror and torture to maintain power, but I understand the sense of hopelessness and powerlessness. These are very human feelings, and ISIS has expertly channeled them to their own ends. I believe the solution is to come up with something better for potential ISIS recruits to grasp onto.

Lynn Magnuson
New Orleans, Louisiana

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Sojourners magazine (ISSN 0364-2097) is published monthly, except September-October is combined, at 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Periodicals Postage Paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Canadian Publications Sales Agreement #257494. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

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Everence

BY JIM WALLIS

A Turning Point on Poverty?



IT'S BEEN HALF a century since Lyndon Johnson declared a War on Poverty, and obviously this is a war that we still haven't won. According to the Census Bureau, in 2013 there were still 45.3 million Americans living in poverty. That's nearly 15 percent of the American people, including one in five children and one in three children of color.

Progress has been made on global poverty, with the proportion of people living in extreme poverty worldwide cut in half between 1990 and 2010, but the World Bank estimates that 1 billion people worldwide still live on less than \$1.25 per day. Push that up to a mere \$2 per day and the number is 2.2 billion people—almost a third of all the people on Earth.

I've always described the central fact of God's economy as this: There

in politics, I see individuals across the political spectrum beginning to ask new and challenging questions about finding better approaches to addressing poverty.

In 2011, a coalition of U.S. Christian organizations from a wide variety of theological backgrounds and political leanings was formed to protect the poor and vulnerable in the federal budget process. Called the Circle of Protection, this coalition includes Christian organizations and institutions such as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Salvation Army, The National Council of Churches, Bread for the World, Sojourners, and many others. We were blessed to be a founding member of the Circle of Protection and a key member of its steering committee.

Since its founding, the Circle of Protection has worked to preserve the integrity of the most effective programs for low-income families and children; the coalition has

had more success than we thought possible. Even in difficult times of budget cutting, a "circle of protection" has kept millions of poor and hungry people from losing key safety nets that prevent them from plunging deeper into poverty.

As we enter into the 2016 presidential election cycle, the Circle of Protection now sees an opportunity to move from *playing defense*—doing what we can to prevent cuts to programs that poor people clearly need—to *playing offense* by providing the opportunity and commitment to move people out of poverty. In January, we announced our plan to do just that, when we issued a clear and strong challenge to all U.S. presidential candidates.

When candidates officially announce their campaigns, they will receive a letter from the Circle of Protection—signed by a diverse group of 100 prominent Christian leaders—requesting that they record a three-minute video spelling out exactly how they propose to solve the problems of poverty in the United States and internationally. These video statements will be posted on the Circle of Protection's website and distributed to the members of our churches and organizations and to the press during the campaign season, without any judgment or comment on our part.

Our intention is to use the candidates' statements to foster a new dialogue across the country, on all political sides, about how we are going to end extreme poverty globally and the shameful poverty we still have in the U.S. Voters will be able to see what each candidate has to say about these issues and decide for themselves which candidate has the best plans. Hopefully, the challenge from the faith community to make the video statements will put more pressure on candidates to take the issues of poverty seriously.

By raising our voices early and often in the 2016 presidential race and creating a forum for candidates to speak specifically on the issue of poverty, we hope that the Circle of Protection will create space in the campaign for poverty to be talked about in a much more serious way by those wishing to lead our country. Our clear purpose will be to see those newly elected leaders finally take an effective path to eradicating extreme poverty in the U.S. and around the world. That will take a citizen movement, and, as followers of Christ, we should accept nothing less. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

The 2016 election is an opportunity for a new dialogue on eliminating extreme poverty, at home and abroad.

is enough, if we share it. There's no question that we have the resources to end poverty globally and domestically. What we lack are the moral resolve, the political will, and better strategies to make it happen. Yet those three may finally be coming together. I believe there are new confluences occurring that could be both helpful and hopeful.

At a meeting at the World Bank in February, a new alliance with the faith community was envisioned that combines proven strategies for overcoming poverty with a prophetic call to people of faith and moral conscience to end extreme poverty by 2030. In the faith community, I see a new generation of Christians rediscovering those Jesus calls the "least of these" in Matthew 25. Even

Associated Press



Oslo Peace Rings

In an initiative by young Muslim leaders in Norway, approximately 1,000 people formed a “ring of peace” in front of Oslo’s synagogue in February to protest a recent series of attacks against Jews in Europe. A week later, hundreds encircled the central mosque in Oslo as a symbolic “thank you” to the Muslims who had formed the earlier peace circle. “When you see each other as human beings,” said one Muslim organizer, “it’s harder to hate the person you know.”

By Beau Underwood

In Sickness and Health

Paid sick leave helps not only the workers but businesses as well.

WHAT IS OUR responsibility to expectant mothers, workers suffering from prolonged illness, or parents with children dealing with a significant sickness? Many Christians will assume the “our” in question refers to individual believers or the church as a community of believers. But what if the “our” refers to society as a whole? How is the question answered then?

This is more than an abstract question. Across the U.S.—at local, state, and federal levels—governments are debating policies that would expand paid sick leave. The issue itself isn’t complicated: Some workers have paid time off when they or a family member falls ill, while tens of millions of others—disproportionately low-wage workers—do not. The latter often face the difficult choice of struggling through shifts while sick or staying home and putting their livelihoods at risk.

The benefits of paid sick leave policies

are well documented, with studies detailing the economic benefits paid sick leave provides by lowering employee turnover and training costs, reducing public-assistance spending, and improving productivity. “Working sick costs the national economy

Millions of low-wage workers get no paid time off when they fall ill.

\$160 billion annually in lost productivity,” according to the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. Even greater gains can be realized when expanded family leave policies are included.

Opponents of expanding paid sick leave contend that such policies are detrimental to

business, but their arguments have proven hollow. In a recent editorial titled “Sick Leave Doesn’t Hurt Business, Says Business,” Bloomberg View columnist Christopher Flavelle examines the actual effects on businesses in jurisdictions where more-expansive policies have been enacted. Based on the evidence, he concludes that few companies have reported a reduction in profits, sick days were used appropriately and the benefit was not abused, workers’ other compensation and hours were not dramatically reduced (countering the theory that companies might offset the costs of providing the benefit), and the prices of goods and services were only marginally effected, despite claims that the additional burdens to employers would be passed on to consumers.

The significant benefits and relatively few costs, the overall popularity of the idea (a 2010 poll by the National Partnership for

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All other air service overseas (one to two weeks delivery): \$59.95 one year. Except where noted, payable in U.S. currency.

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Newsstand circulation through Disticor Magazine Distribution Services. For more information, call (905) 619-6565, fax (905) 619-2903, or email mraucci@disticor.com.

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Women and Families found overwhelming support for a variety of laws that would expand paid sick leave), and a sustained campaign supporting paid sick leave have pushed the issue into the national spotlight. Earlier this year, President Obama announced an executive action providing additional benefits to federal workers and urged Congress to pass the Healthy Families Act, which would allow employees to earn one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked, capped at 56 hours annually, unless the employer chooses to set a higher limit.

Some Christians are leading on this issue. In urging the city council of Tacoma, Wash., to pass a paid sick leave law (which it did in January), Rev. Ann Adkinson, a pastor at Tacoma's First United Methodist Church, said, "I and members of my congregation feel this is a justice issue that springs out of who Jesus was and good news for the poor and oppressed that he came to proclaim." In a *Christianity Today* online article looking

at the maternity-leave policies at Christian colleges and universities, Mandy McMichael asked what *not* offering paid maternity leave "says about [Christian employers'] commitment to families when they fail to support families through their own maternity leave policies."

And that's the crux of the issue. Christian political activism on the Right in recent decades has often been self-defined as "pro-family." Sadly, many of these initiatives were more about politics than policy outcomes. But the movement for paid sick leave could be the exception to this rule, if Christians of all stripes are willing to find common ground in support of a relatively small policy goal that could have large, positive effects for both families and the nation. ■

Beau Underwood, former senior director of advocacy and communications for Sojourners, is a Disciples of Christ pastor in Jefferson City, Mo.

By David Cortright

Vietnam Agonistes

The battle for hearts and minds continues, 50 years later.

THIS YEAR MARKS multiple 50th anniversaries of the U.S. escalation of the war in Vietnam and the beginning of major anti-war protests. To mark the anniversary of the war, the Pentagon is sponsoring an official, multimillion dollar Vietnam War Commemoration to "thank and honor veterans." This program has been criticized as a Vietnam whitewash and an attempt to rewrite history. The Pentagon commission will sponsor more than 1,000 events around the country that will have the effect of honoring the military and obscuring, behind a façade of false patriotism, the painful truths of the Vietnam War.

The Pentagon's commemorations are missing any consideration of critical unlearned lessons, such as: 1) the Vietnam War was unjust and never should have been fought, 2) wars of military intervention have failed and should be avoided, 3) militarism and war have corrupted U.S. political decision-making, and 4) diplomacy, development, and peacebuilding strategies are preferable and more effective means of

resolving international conflict.

Also missing from the Pentagon's plan is any mention of the massive public opposition to that war, including from many of us who were GIs and veterans. There is no acknowledgement in the Pentagon's official events of Howard Zinn's important truth: "In the course of that war, there developed in the United States the greatest anti-war movement the nation had ever experienced, a movement that played a critical part in bringing the war to an end."

In response to the Pentagon program, more than 1,400 people signed an open letter urging the inclusion of anti-war perspectives in any taxpayer-funded commemorative events. (The letter was featured in a front-page story in *The New York Times* last October.) Anti-Vietnam War activists have formed the Vietnam Peace Commemoration Committee to sponsor a series of events on the critical unlearned lessons of the war. Our goal is to 1) recall the false assumptions and distortions that led to the war, 2) acknowledge the breadth and legitimacy of anti-war

From the Archives

May 1992

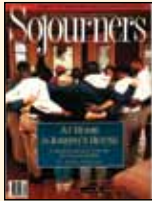
A Threat to Peace

THE DEATH of former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin on March 9 brought back memories of high hopes for Middle East peace. ... Begin's passing also recalled his determination to establish Israeli settlements on the West Bank's Occupied Territories, areas he called by their biblical names—Judea and Samaria. The day after his election as prime minister in May 1977, Begin visited one of the handful of settlements then in existence, Elon Moreh, to declare: "There will be many, many settlements in the coming weeks."

Fifteen years after the late prime minister's promise to implement the 1974 Gush Emunim plan for putting 100,000 Jewish settlers onto the West Bank, 91,000 Jews actually live there, with some 157,000 others in the rest of the territories annexed by Israel after the 1967 Six-Day War. In all, nearly one quarter of a million Israelis, 5 percent of the country's total population, reside in these settlements.

Today, using as justification the need to accommodate thousands of Jewish emigres from what was the Soviet Union, the Israeli government continues building settlements in the Occupied Territories. Most observers believe this threatens the peace process currently under way between Israel and its Arab neighbors, serves as a continued irritant for U.S. relations with Israel, and may delay to the point of no return any solution regarding a Palestinian homeland. ■

Joe Nangle, OFM, was outreach director at *Sojourners* when this article appeared.



dissent, and 3) identify the critical unlearned lessons for ongoing U.S. foreign policy.

"Vietnam: The Power of Protest. Telling the Truth. Learning the Lessons" will be held in Washington, D.C., on May 1 and 2. This historic event will conclude with participants marching from the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and on to the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, where we will recall King's courageous stand against the war and his powerful statement, "I oppose the Vietnam War because I love America."

The importance of addressing the critical lessons of the war was articulated well by former Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial this past Veterans Day. "The Wall reminds us to be honest in our telling of history," Hagel said. "There is nothing to be gained by glossing

over the darker portions of a war ... that bitterly divided America. We must openly acknowledge past mistakes, and we must learn from past mistakes, because that is how we avoid repeating past mistakes."

The planned peace commemorations are not just about the history of Vietnam. They are a reminder of the folly of war and the importance for today of learning from the past. The failure to learn the lessons of Vietnam has led to the disasters in Iraq and Afghanistan and to our deepening military involvement in the Middle East today. The tradition of resistance to unjust war remains as relevant now as it was then. ■

David Cortright, a *Sojourners* contributing writer, was an anti-war GI during the Vietnam War. Visit lessonsofvietnam.org for more on the peace commemoration.

By Mavis Biss

Moral Free-Riders

The "me first" attitude of anti-vaxxers puts others at risk.

IMMANUEL KANT has been on my mind as I've followed the national response to recent measles outbreaks. Kant, a German philosopher, emphasized the danger of a temptation we are all vulnerable to—the temptation to make special exceptions for ourselves. The person who acts against

forego vaccination, "herd immunity" is lost and disease outbreaks occur.

In a public without herd immunity, the risks posed by disease far exceed the small risks associated with vaccination. In other words, free-riding does not work when everyone is doing it. Herd immunity

Could I justify my choice if another child were to die from a disease contracted from my unvaccinated child?

principles that she thinks others ought to follow becomes a kind of moral "free-rider," attempting to benefit from public moral order without contributing to it.

The spread of disease among the intentionally unvaccinated highlights the free-rider problem faced by parents who seek exemption from vaccination.

Some people believe that leaving their children unvaccinated (or under-vaccinated) minimizes their children's health risks. If everyone around them has been vaccinated, their risk of infection is indeed low. But when too many people decide to

does not require universal vaccination, but it does require vaccination of a sufficient majority.

Who should get to be in the minority that remains unvaccinated and yet retains protection from disease? This is who: Babies who are too young to be vaccinated, our elders who cannot mount a robust immune response to some types of vaccines, and cancer patients and people with compromised immune systems all clearly have a claim to be shielded by their neighbors' immunity. The decision to ask for an exemption for one's own healthy child is a

morally risky decision, one that requires an honest examination of conscience.

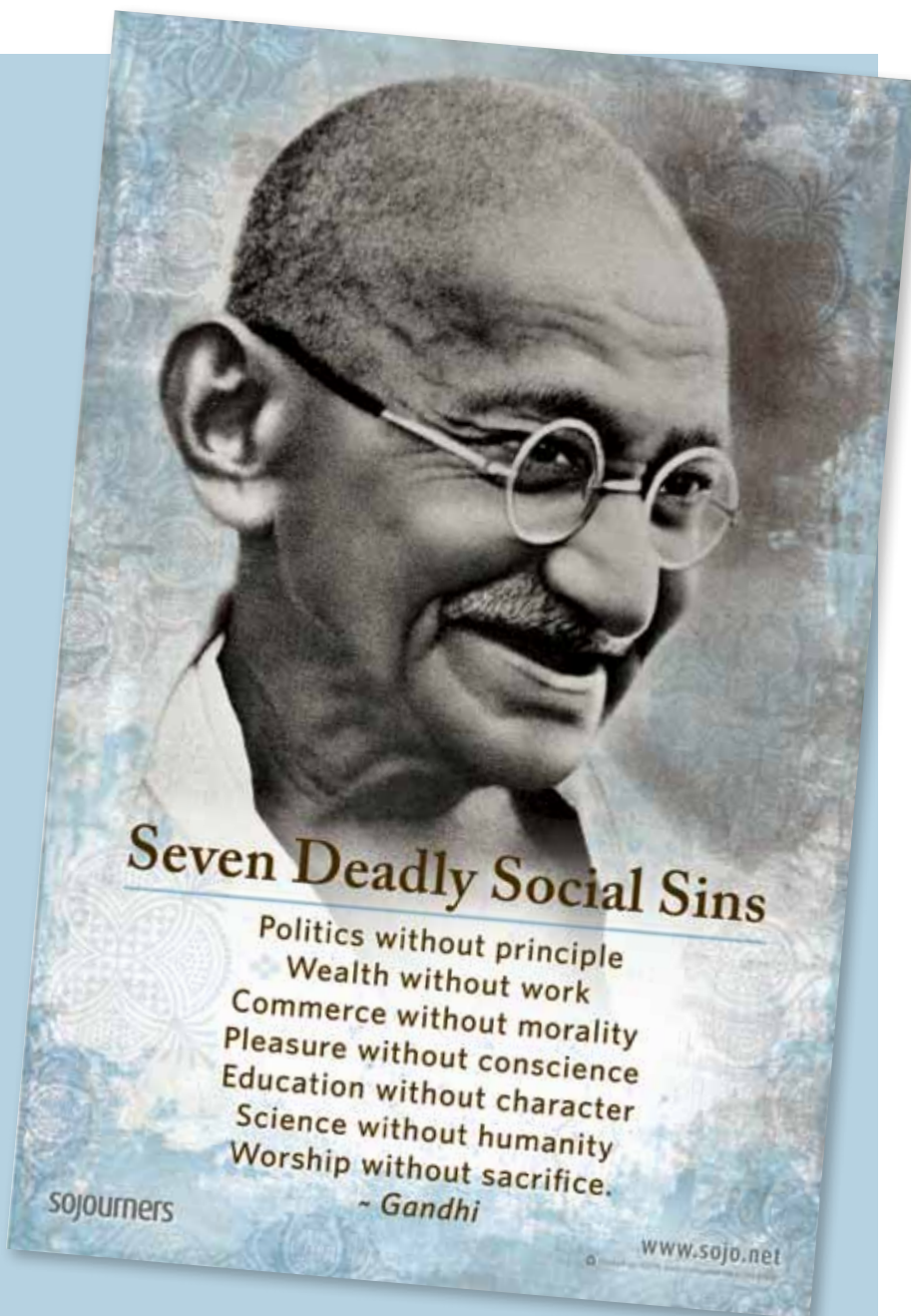
Kant thought of conscience as an inner judge, a “scrutinizer of hearts.” I have come to think of my conscience not as a private sense of right and wrong but as an inner voice that keeps my actions in line with publicly defensible moral standards. Do I think that my own child deserves exemption from the very small risks associated with vaccination more than other generally healthy children? I remind myself that the majority of parents must accept these small risks in order to guard against the much greater risks that infectious disease epidemics would pose to everyone’s children. Could I, in good conscience, justify my choice if another child were to suffer permanent health problems or even die from a disease contracted from my unvaccinated child?

Parents with financial means can move to a different neighborhood to save their children from dangerous, failing, or underfunded schools. You can buy your child a better public or private education. But you can’t move to a district where your child’s health will not impact and be impacted by the health of others (such a place would be one void of neighbors to fear or love). You can’t buy into a public with herd immunity either, yet you may choose to share the responsibility for sustaining this resource. The health of our bodies always depends on choices other people make.

I assume that when people say “I would do anything for my child,” they do not mean to suggest that they would act against their most deeply held moral commitments. Many people of faith strive to fulfill a moral commitment that takes the form of an aspiration: to love one’s neighbor.

In Søren Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love*, he remind us, “If there are only two people, the other person is the neighbor; if there are millions, every one of these is a neighbor, who in turn is closer than the friend and the beloved.” What better way to extend love to our million neighbors than to choose to vaccinate ourselves and our very nearest neighbors, our children? ■

Mavis Biss is an assistant professor of philosophy at Loyola University Maryland.



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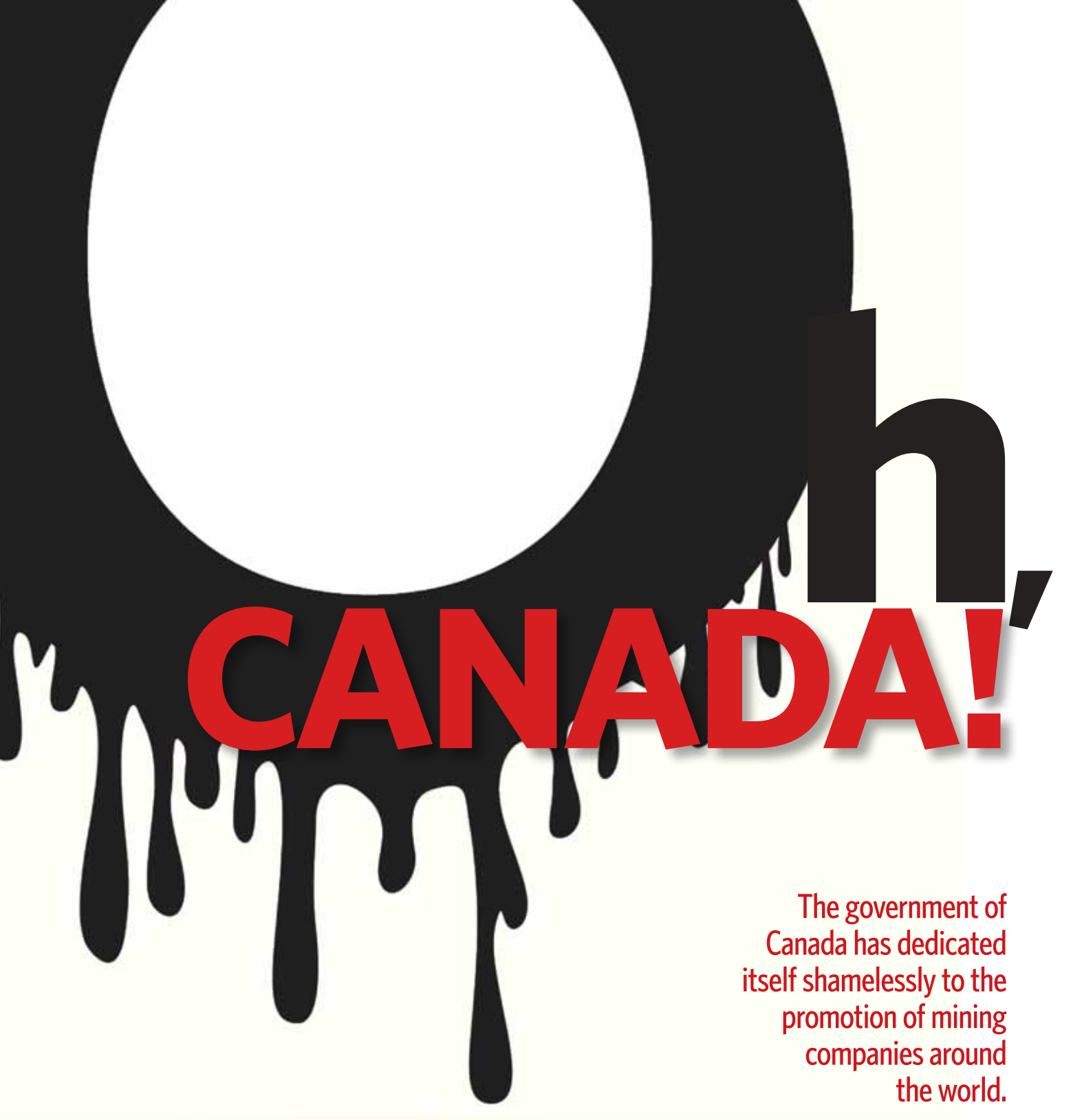
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h, **CANADA!**

The government of
Canada has dedicated
itself shamelessly to the
promotion of mining
companies around
the world.

Canadians are supposed to be the good guys in the story. Well, not anymore • by EMILIE TERESA SMITH

DOÑA DIODORA STANDS on the side of the mountain, shivering. She's tending to her skinny cows. A simple adobe hut stands here on the edge of her land in the Guatemalan highlands—"so I can stay and look after the animals," she says. "But I don't know what I am going to do about water. They've taken away the water."

Tears drip down out of her good eye. She dries them on a thin sleeve. The other eye socket, shattered where the bullet went through, seeps with yellow pus. "*Me siento un poco triste*—a little sad," she explains in her halting, quiet Spanish. It is cold on the mountain, achingly so. And, mysteriously, the water has gone: Old streams and wells are dusty. The cows look ill.

Just down the crumbling mountain, the tailings pond from the Marlin mine glows a weird shade of neon green.

I first heard about the Marlin mine—operated by Vancouver's Goldcorp—in 2005, before it opened. That year I was going to Guatemala with a youth group from my diocese, and we were warned: Don't wear anything that identifies you as Canadians. What? Canadians? We're supposed to be the good guys in the story. Well, not anymore.

The great global economic shift in the

mid-1990s, a free-for-all (if you were already rich) of unbridled neo-liberal capitalism, unleashed an invigorated predatory wave of miners—from Canada—all around the planet to sniff out new places to dig. Canada is *the* place to raise venture mining capital—the heaps of cash needed to fund these monstrously expensive projects.

Canada has few laws or functioning regulations to control investments or protect human rights and the environment far from our shores. Thus it's not surprising that 75 percent of international mining companies are registered in Canada and 60 percent are listed on Canadian stock exchanges. In Latin America alone there are around 1,500 mining projects, involving 230 Canadian companies.

Mining Watch, Canada's top mining observer, has documented that 90 of these companies are involved in 200 conflicts. The main points of contention are water contamination and drastic depletion, land expropriation and devastation, and the lack of community consultation.

Local populations have massively rejected these exploitative practices. They have seen it all before: Promises of jobs, money, and progress, followed by the realities of shattered lives and never-cleaned-up toxic waste. Doña Diodora



Amnesty International

A Guatemalan woman looks over a Canadian-owned mine.

We have bought into the idea that what is wrong in the world is “underdevelopment,” not rampant greed on the part of an ever-decreasing minority.

was shot by midnight strangers at her door, after she openly resisted the Marlin mine for more than five years, refusing to sell her land and refusing to shut up.

I have seen these often-deadly clashes in the flesh—in Guatemala, where I have lived off and on for many years, and then up and down the spine of Latin America. In 2012, I was elected co-president of a historic network of liberation theologians and practitioners that formed in the aftermath of the martyrdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero. In that capacity I have visited El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Argentina, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. In each country, as I stepped off the plane, community leaders came to me wanting to talk about the conflicts around Canadian mining in their country. Walls sprayed with graffiti presented me time and again with the unhappy message: “*Mineras canadienses*—OUT!”

Providing shelter for industry

Meanwhile, back in Canada, there have been numerous attempts to create control mechanisms for mining behavior. They have all met with obfuscation and obstruction. In 2009, a private members bill (Bill C 300, for Corporate Accountability for the Activities of Mining in Developing Countries) was brought to the Canadian parliament. Mining companies rushed to fund and organize some of the most intense lobbying ever seen in Ottawa. The bill was defeated.

The government of Canada, especially under the nine-year reign of ultraconservative Stephen Harper, has dedicated itself to the promotion of mining companies around the world. While community, environmental, and religious groups have rallied on every front, both in Canada and in the ravaged countries where the mines are going in, the Canadian government

Canada's Shameful Exports

Fifty years of bloody conflict, economic greed, and environmental devastation.

CANADIAN MINING companies have left a trail of destruction around the world—mostly in places where people are poor and vulnerable.

The earliest conflicts caused by Canadian mining exploded in **Guatemala** in the early 1960s when the nickel company Inco dug into the northern mountainside of Guatemala's largest freshwater lake, Lago Izabal. Almost 155 square miles of traditional Kekchi-Maya land was expropriated to create Inco's Exmibal mine. As the region descended into bitter war, Guatemalan oligarchs and their military, with the support of Canadian-mining and U.S. geopolitical interests, exterminated all popular dissent. Dozens of Kekchi leaders were killed or disappeared; four prominent leaders who had published a report condemning the Inco-Exmibal deals were brutally assaulted and two of them assassinated. The Exmibal mine operated for three years before Inco abandoned it, never paying a nickel in royalties to Guatemala.

Meanwhile, in **the Philippines**, Vancouver-based Placer Dome arrived on Marinduque

Island and sunk in a filthy copper mine. Over the next three decades, Placer Dome operated the Marcopper mine, devastating the local environment and its communities. From 1975 to 1991, Placer Dome dumped 200 metric tons of toxic waste into Calancan Bay, and in March 1996 a massive rupture from the tailings pond flooded 60 villages with toxic waste, permanently destroying community lands, rice fields, and shrimp marshes. The Boac River was declared dead, and the U.N. pronounced it a major environmental disaster. The entire Marcopper mine project was abandoned; no major attempt at clean-up ever took place. In 2006, Placer Dome was taken over by the giant, Toronto-based Barrick Gold, one of the world's largest mining companies. In 2008, the provincial government of Marinduque began a lawsuit, but Barrick has fussed and delayed, dragging the court case on endlessly.

Barrick is also responsible for the massive \$8.5 billion boondoggle of the Pascua Lama gold mine. Saddled in the Andes between **Chile and Argentina**, the mine threatens to blow up hundreds of glaciers and drastically impact the Atacama Desert—one of the driest regions of the world. In response to the long-ignored concerns of Diaguita Indigenous

has showered resources—diplomatic, legal, and economic—to shelter industry.

The only government response to growing demands for mandatory controls on mining companies has been the creation of a toothless Office of the Extractive Sector Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Counsellor. The office, set up “to assist stakeholders in the resolution of CSR issues pertaining to the activities of Canadian extractive sector companies abroad,” has seen four cases in the five years since its creation—and not a single conflict has been resolved, not even remotely. The complaint and review process is completely voluntary on the part of industry; in all of the cases brought forward, the company has simply refused to participate. The Counsellor office has operated as a screen to greenwash the hopelessly destructive practice of modern mining.

Canadian nongovernmental organizations

pushing to hold mining companies accountable (such as the Catholic group Development and Peace and the ecumenical Kairos Canada) have had their government funding slashed. Other NGOs (such as World Vision-Canada and Plan Canada) have accepted more than \$6.5 million—of Canadian taxpayers’ money—to in effect run the companies’ CSR programs and, in the process, help to pacify local resistance movements around the world.

Most Canadian citizens are blithely unaware of what is happening in our name. We have bought into the idea that what is wrong in the world is “underdevelopment,” not rampant greed on the part of an ever-decreasing minority. In the “mercantile cosmology,” where the whole world is for sale and nothing is worth anything if it isn’t marketable, international mining blasts a “win-win” rhetoric that carries the day.

A stroll around Toronto or Vancouver

communities and others, the Chilean government eventually suspended Barrick’s license, but glaciologists report that the pre-mining activity has already wreaked irreversible destruction in the area.

Papua New Guinea hosts the massive Barrick Porgera mine, built right on top of local Ipili communities; multiple claims of

shadows of the same story emerge in **D.R.**

Congo: Security guards for Montreal’s Anvil mines have been accused of providing cover for government soldiers engaging in the massacre of civilians. In **El Salvador**, Vancouver’s Pacific Rim (now OceanaGold) sued the Salvadoran government, claiming that the country violated international trade law by

refusing to allow the company to dig a massive gold mine that would have drastically polluted the country’s thin water supplies. Four community activists of the Cabañas region, where the project was to go in, have been murdered, including

Dora Alicia Recinos, who was eight months pregnant when she was shot dead.

The common denominators in these countries and elsewhere are corrupt local officials with ready access to people-controlling violence—a perfect environment for Canadian mining. The low-paying jobs, taxes, royalties, and other economic gains in the short term in no way compensate for permanent environmental devastation and community conflict inevitably caused by mining.

—**Emilie Teresa Smith**

The common denominators in these countries are corrupt local officials with ready access to violence—a perfect environment for Canadian mining.

grave human rights violations have been reported. Bought-off police and mining company security guards have been accused of murder, beatings, home burnings, and gang rape. The former chair of Barrick, Peter Munk, was quoted in a Canadian newspaper in 2011 that “gang rape is a cultural habit [of the traditional people of Papua New Guinea]. Of course, you can’t say that because it’s politically incorrect.”

Horrendous violence has also been reported at Barrick’s mine in **Tanzania**. And



reveals the depth to which mining enterprises—while sabotaging mandatory regulations—have purchased the consent of the Canadian public. In British Columbia, for example, Goldcorp nestles its money and its name into the Vancouver Opera Society, the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, the Aquarium, the Tap Society, Science World, Bard-on-the-Beach, Arts Umbrella, Big Brothers, YMCA, the Nature

Goldcorp acts as a “good corporate citizen,” and Canadians nod in agreement.

Trust of British Columbia, the Special Olympics, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the Goldcorp Mental Health Centre, every major Vancouver hospital, Simon Fraser University, and the University of British Columbia. Community, health, education, and arts institutions—in desperate straits due to drastic funding cut-backs—are anxious to take the money. Goldcorp acts as a “good corporate citizen,” and Canadians nod in agreement.

Another way citizens are enmeshed—often without knowing—in controversial international mining projects is through deep ties between industry and pension plans. The national government Canada Pension Plan, to which every working Canadian makes monthly contributions, is one of the largest group investors in Goldcorp. Trade union, teacher, and other public servant union pension plans are not far behind, holding heavy investments in numerous mining corporations. Even churches have their fingers in this sticky, money-making pie.

Resisting the onslaught

Around the world (see “Canada’s Shameful Exports,” previous page), open—and costly—resistance to massive mining projects has arisen since the beginning of the Canadian invasions. While industry appears to have every advantage on its side, determined individuals and groups have created strategic campaigns in defense of their territories.

In Guatemala, Mayan communities have launched dozens of public consultations, availing themselves of both traditional decision-making models and international agreements. They have vigorously applied Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization’s code on the rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. In

more than 85 communities, upwards of 1 million Guatemalan citizens have studied, debated, and finally voted on whether or not to accept extractive industries in their territory. Their resounding answer: No.

There has been a rising tide of organized defense of territory by communities across Canada as well. About 200 miles from where I live, there is a sacred lake, known to the Tsilhqot’in people as Teztan Biny and to English speakers as Fish Lake. It is home to 85,000 rainbow trout. Vancouver-based Taseko Mines crafted a plan to use Teztan Biny as a tailings pond, to hold the

dirty water from their proposed “Prosperity Mine.” The Tsilhqot’in people and their supporters were having none of it. They organized a years-long campaign of study and defense and, finally, in February 2014 the project was rejected by the federal minister of the environment.

The resistance of the Tsilhqot’in people was a prophetic act: Six months after the federal decision, the holding wall of the Mount Polley Mine tailings pond—only 82 miles from Teztan Biny—ruptured. In the biggest mine spill in Canadian history, waste water and toxic sludge burst out, destroying Hazelton Creek and pouring into the deep, pristine Lake Quesnel.

It isn’t surprising that the struggle to protect the earth has been taken up by Indigenous communities and others who live close to the soil—and the cycle of creation, growth, and decay upon which it depends. Motivated by a deep love for the land, these communities have supplied a critical challenge to the dominant story that progress and right-living necessarily depend on the destruction of creation.

Theirs is a loud proclamation of a different truth: The Earth is not a thing to be bought, sold, used, and destroyed. Our eternal connection to the dust is that we are dust. We are not the Creator, but frail creatures, utterly dependent on the care of the Earth, her mountains, her water, streams, and deepness underground. As the psalmist reminds us, the Earth is not ours, but God’s; we live with tender mercy and grace upon her abundant belly. ■

Emilie Teresa Smith, an Argentine-Canadian Anglican priest, is co-president of the Oscar Romero International Network in Solidarity with the Peoples of Latin America. She is working on a book about Canadian mining companies in Guatemala.

Called to Lead, Bank Accounts Be Damned!

SHE WAS MAD—fuming.

Thirteen black evangelical leaders rolled across Southern states on a speaking tour of historic black colleges and universities. On a mission to call forth the next generation of black leaders, we traversed the land where our ancestors had worked fingers to bone, drank from separate fountains, and cut loved ones down from trees like dead fruit.

But this is not what made Vera mad.

For the last hour a crowd of black leaders sat, stood, and leaned in as we shared our stories of barriers to advancement within white evangelical organizations. It wasn't a mean-spirited conversation. It was a needed one—a healing one. Our stories were strikingly similar, even



she feel our gripes were unjustified?

"I'm mad that this is exactly what I have been experiencing inside my own organization," she continued. "I've tried to explain it to our leaders, but no one has heard me."

Vera's organization trains evangelicals to partner with under-resourced communities. Vera grew

up poor. Though she holds a mid-level administrative position now, she entered the agency as a trainee. The high training fees, coupled with her current

low salary, present ongoing barriers to social inclusion among her white peers and threaten her family's economic stability. To boot, the organization's bent toward male dominance has further jeopardized Vera's economic health. A male peer was offered a scholarship to supplement the cost of his training fees; Vera was denied. She was told the limited resources had to help men first.

Vera's struggle is not unique. While serving as Greater Los Angeles director of racial reconciliation for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship from 2000 to 2005, I discovered that most black and Latino/a InterVarsity staff were going

into debt in order to work for the ministry while white staff leveraged the benefits of inherited wealth and

financial gifts from family to buy homes and build personal wealth.

A recent study by the Pew Research Center crystalizes the structural inequity baked into organizations that assess leadership by one's ability to rake in cash. According to the analysis, in 2013, whites in the U.S. enjoyed a median net wealth of \$141,900—more than 13 times the \$11,000 median net wealth of African Americans. Worse, this gap has been widening since 2007.

By a monetary measure, white Americans appear far superior to blacks in their capacity for leadership. Yet this measure pays no consideration to centuries of structures built to protect white supremacy on a sloped U.S. playing field.

But here's the kicker: Money has no place in the discernment process for leadership. In the first chapter of Genesis, God called all humanity to steward, serve, and protect—the calling to exercise dominion. What we need are level playing fields.

Unmoored from its theological roots, white evangelical homage to a Calvinist work ethic trusts in monetary success as a sign of divine election to lead. This trust is in weighted scales. And it continues to reinforce economic structures that cripple the church and disfigure the world.

Our preaching was fiery that night. We called Dillard students to stand in their God-given call to lead, bank accounts be damned. Money is no indicator of election. The fact that we are human—fully human—is proof enough. We, too, were created to lead. ■

*Lisa Sharon Harper is chief church engagement officer for Sojourners and co-author of *A Compromised Faith* (Zondervan 2014).*

We watched our white peers accept the same salaries but somehow take vacations and buy homes—while we scrimped to pay rent.

though none of us had worked in the same organization.

Within well-meaning white evangelical missions agencies, we had all been told that confirmation of our call to leadership would be discerned in part by our ability to raise money for the organization. Mind you, most of us had taken on debt to accept the low salaries offered by the white agencies. And most of us suffered economic isolation as we watched our white peers accept the same salaries but somehow take vacations and buy homes while we scrimped to pay rent.

Now, as our chartered bus eased its way through the narrow, tree-lined lanes at Dillard University in New Orleans, Vera said: "I'm mad at this conversation."

Vera (we'll call her that) was new to our traveling village, so I didn't know how to read her anger. Did



Beyond the Wheelchair Ramp

What do people with disabilities need from the church?

by **SUSAN WINDLEY-DAOUST**

RECENTLY, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH moved toward beatifying Archbishop Óscar Romero, who was martyred while presiding at a Mass in El Salvador in 1980. Romero preached that, for the love of God, soldiers and paramilitary forces must stop murdering their brothers and sisters—and he paid with his life. Many have since honored his witness during El Salvador’s civil war as “a voice for the voiceless.” Without a doubt, more of us should take on that mantle.

Sometimes we are
not called to be a voice
for the voiceless.

And yet. Sometimes we are *not* called to be a voice for the voiceless. Sometimes we are called to listen carefully and discover the voices in our midst. Sometimes we are called to consider whether *we* are the ones preventing voices from being heard.

We are almost 25 years beyond the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and while access is still not all it should be, we need to move beyond the wheelchair ramp. We need to *listen* to those living with disabilities—as fully human, as fallen and holy, as friends of Christ, as people with abilities, as disciples on the Way.

Getty Images



What is disability? This simple question is not easily answered. There are people living with *impairments*, a loss of expected physiological form or function. A person missing a leg. A person whose optic nerve did not develop correctly. A person who has sustained a brain injury. The *disability* refers to the consequences of an impairment: loss of walking, blindness, memory issues. *Handicap*, in turn, refers to the societal disadvantage resulting from an impairment.

But when talking to people living with disabilities, those clear-cut categories become muddy. Some embrace the term “disability” as a simple aspect of who they are, a way of describing their lives and advocating for societal change. Others reject the term, saying they perceive no negative consequences from their impairments, only positives. Others fear the term and simply do not use it.

And the lived experience of people with disabilities varies widely: To live without hearing is not the same as to live without legs, or to live without an ability to learn, or to live with severe depression. Additionally, people’s attitudes toward their disabilities are in part shaped by whether they were born with them or whether they acquired them by injury, illness, or old age. We simply cannot make sweeping generalities about an experience of disability.

But those of us who are what Amos Yong, professor of theology and mission at Fuller Theological Seminary, calls “temporarily abled” *can* do two things. First, we can initiate relationship from a position of receptivity, of learning. While undoubtedly there are people with disabilities who need our help, our first move as brothers and sisters in Christ should be to take our place as the “younger” sibling: We are the ones needing guidance. We need to learn, from ongoing brother or sisterhood with the person, what we need to be in community together.

I recall answering the phone at a startup Catholic Worker house of hospitality to hear, “Hi, we’re from XYZ church, and we’re going to build 50 bunk beds for your shelter!” Never mind that it was a house that held 15 people max, family style. The intentions may have been good, but listening and learning what was truly needed would have been better. We needed bread and received a stone (Luke 11:11). We all need to foster relationships through a willingness to listen and

learn, to recognize that our “elder” brothers and sisters have something to teach us.

Second, a simple way to defuse the negative cultural attitudes around disability is to recognize that as creatures, we are all inherently limited. Deborah Creamer, a theologian living with disability, offers this insight: Perhaps limits are good, or at least neutral. As an example, I can flap my arms as hard as I want, but I cannot fly, unless I board an airplane. *That* limit isn’t seen as problematic: We adjust, adapt, and slow down. What if we saw impairments as a specific type of limit? Perhaps not all impairments need to be seen as tragic, or even problems. Undoubtedly, some are. But the first assumption should be more neutral. That way, limits can be acknowledged and negotiated as needed: We all have them. And we are called to help each other live with and through those limits.

What does it mean to listen as church?

Human beings are not good listeners. We hear what we want to hear; our antennae are often tuned by our own assumptions. Yet as important as it is to recognize this—to bracket those assumptions and really listen to a person living with disabilities—it is not enough. How do we *as the body of Christ* listen to people living with disabilities? The lived experiences of disability vary widely, but common concerns arise.

I offer three examples of life-honoring listening: listening for the voice of a culture, listening to challenge “the suffering card,” and listening to ideas that reorient everything. They challenge and improve the way we understand what it means to be the body of Christ.

Listening for the voice of a culture. Are there cultures created by groups of people living with disabilities? Almost certainly there are: Deaf culture is a prominent example, building in the U.S. and other countries on its particular language, ASL. If you have been to a prayer service crafted by and for people who cannot talk, or talk well, perhaps you have seen a culture at work among those who are low-verbal or nonverbal. There are subcultures as well: For example, get to know family members of a child with disabilities and you realize they are living in two worlds,

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At L’Arche, “there is no rivalry, no degree to be acquired, no honor to be desired—just faithful service.”

—Henri Nouwen



Opposite page, members of one of four L’Arche community houses in the D.C. area. Above, a community member prays during a worship service.



Photos courtesy L'Arche community

School of Love

For 50 years, people with and without developmental disabilities have shared life in L'Arche communities.

by **JENNA BARNETT**

WHEN FATHER THOMAS PHILIPPE brought philosopher Jean Vanier on a tour of asylums, institutions, and psychiatric hospitals, Vanier discovered “a whole new world of marginalized people ... hidden away far from the rest of society, so that nobody could be reminded of their existence.” A year after this realization, recounted in *The Heart of L'Arche*, Vanier founded the first L'Arche community in his new home in France. Vanier shared meals, celebrations, and grievances with Raphael Simi and Philippe Seux, two men who had lived in asylums ever since their parents passed away.

Vanier was inspired by life with these friends, and motivated by a new understanding of Luke 14:12-14: “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

In the words of Vanier, “L'Arche is a school of love.” It is a “family created and sustained by God,” and it is an embodiment of the belief that “each person is unique, precious, and sacred.” In practice, L'Arche is a global network of communities: People living with and without

developmental disabilities sharing meals, prayers, work, and advocacy efforts.

Eileen, an artist and a member of the L'Arche community in the Washington, D.C. area, explained to *Sojourners* that through L'Arche she can explore museums, create and share art, cook and host a pork-chop dinner, or stay in and watch television with friends. She's learned much over her decades with L'Arche and, she explained, “I teach people how to pray.”

This model of shared life is the natural expression of intentional listening and biblical stewardship. L'Arche challenges the Western cultural assumption that successful societies must run on hierarchy, competitiveness, and individualism. At L'Arche, success itself is distorted and overwhelmed with love. In *The Road to Daybreak*, renowned theologian Henri Nouwen writes this about his time at L'Arche after leaving Harvard: “Here there is no urge to success; here time is filled with dressing, feeding, carrying, and just being with those in need. It is a very demanding and tiring way, but there is no rivalry, no degree to be acquired, no honor to be desired—just faithful service.”

While many of L'Arche's 146 communities were founded in the Roman Catholic tradition, today L'Arche USA communities are ecumenical and welcome people of all faiths. In 2014, L'Arche celebrated its 50th anniversary, and earlier this year, Vanier was named recipient of the Templeton Prize, an annual award recognizing “entrepreneurs of the spirit.” You can join the celebration by praying the “Jubilee Prayer,” read by L'Arche communities across 35 countries:

Loving God, you called us into being and gave us our mission. Thank you for the gift of one another. Thank you for our journey together in L'Arche from the beginning till now. Help us continue to grow in our response to you, listening to your voice within us, seeing you around us, delighting in our gifts, forgiving one another for our failings, trusting in you, and welcoming tomorrow in faith, hope, and love. ■

Jenna Barnett is a Sojourners editorial assistant.



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A RACE & POVERTY INITIATIVE FROM **sojourners**

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including one that involves a parallel subculture of IEPs, insurance claims, doctors, and social workers.

Over the centuries, Western Christians have often approached different cultures with an attitude of disrespect, preventing new converts from adapting the faith to their home culture. What would happen if we recognized and honored that people with disabilities often live in their own culture or subculture? Does the Christian message need to be enculturated, and if so, how?

Ben Conner, a theologian at Western Theological Seminary in Michigan, argues that any Christian participating in the *Missio Dei* (the Mission of God) must consider that outreach to people with disabilities is not simply a pious nicety but rather a call to be the church of one Lord, many cultures; and we begin by listening and learning about the other's culture. We should also understand, and welcome, that people living with disabilities will proactively acculturate the Christian message.

A Catholic parish in New York City that was devoted to the deaf community (but open to all) was recently slated for closure as part of the diocese's reorganization plan. While any such closure is sad, in this case the pain was compounded because the community wasn't consulted in the process. Instead, there were weak assurances that accommodations would be made. But as many in the community noted, an ASL interpreter at liturgy is not enough. It's also about the opportunity to proclaim the word in ASL, to "sing" in ASL, to receive the sacrament of reconciliation (confession) in ASL, to share in the joys and struggles particular to deaf culture. It seems no one at the diocesan level thought of those issues. All they needed to do was ask and listen. It's essential that we recognize and honor the intrinsic human dignity of each person. But part of honoring human dignity is understanding a person's culture, and allowing that person to express his or her insights regarding the Christian message. This is not abstract. Genuine community living teaches you all that you need to know, if you listen.

Listening to challenge "the suffering card."
Most "abled" people assume that disability

involves suffering. And sometimes it does. People in chronic pain physically suffer. But too often it appears that the abled community, at best, is projecting suffering onto those with disabilities and, at worst, causing the suffering. At the Summer Institute on Theology and Disability in 2014, Yong argued that those who are “temporarily abled” often view people living with disabilities through the lens of suffering. But what if, he says, “the sense of suffering [of the person with disabilities] has to do with [his/her] self-perception of failing to live up to the values and expectations of others”—that is, those who are abled? Whenever the abled act in ways that communicate to those living with disabilities “You are flawed; let me help you”—no matter how well-intentioned—the helper simultaneously has made assumptions *and* negated the person’s human agency. What if more suffering is caused by paternalistic attempts to address the challenges of disability than by any physical pain?

The issue is complex, because we are called as Christians to help those in need, especially those who suffer. The challenge is to work *with* people with disabilities to discern their true needs. We can begin by not assuming that every disability creates suffering.

Listening to ideas that reorient everything. Finally, there are ideas that simply change the way we see the world. Well-known ethicist Stanley Hauerwas came to write theologically about disability while volunteering with a day program for the intellectually disabled in South Bend, Ind. Hauerwas, known for asking unexpected questions, did not disappoint: What if, he said, every college campus—particularly every Christian college campus—had a L’Arche community in the center of it? L’Arche communities create space where the intellectually disabled and abled share common life together. Two U.S. divinity schools do something similar: Western Theological Seminary and Duke Divinity School have “friendship houses.”

How would that vision of community change what we see as the purpose of education? Would it break through the ivory tower pursuits of privilege, achievement, and accomplishment? Would it put the focus back on learning not just from books but

from community living? Would it make the college campus a little more tolerant, inclusive, peaceful, human, and humane? What if living well, in community with the intellectually disabled, became one of the goals of a Christian college education?

BACK TO ARCHBISHOP Romero. He truly was a voice for the voiceless, using his pulpit and influence to draw attention to the persecution of the poor majority in El Salvador. But let us remember the background story. Romero didn’t begin as a firebrand. Those who knew him describe him as bookish, shy, genuinely devout, and apolitical. His elevation to archbishop thrust him into a hothouse. Especially after the murder of his brother priest, Father Rutilio Grande, his role as pastor called him to listen to those grieving. That listening was the water to the seed of his voice.

While some of the most vulnerable do indeed need another to be a voice, many are best recognized as members of the body of Christ by listening—and by lifting the barriers that prevent full agency in the church. When we hear through Vanderbilt’s special education professor Erik Carter’s work that *90 percent of people living with disabilities in the United States are unchurched*, we know something is deeply wrong. The first thing to do is to ask those living with disabilities: What should we do about this?

But there is a much deeper conversation waiting to be had here. As essential as it is to underline the humanity and dignity of all people, including those living with disabilities, it is only a first step. We need to value difference and practice genuine inclusion through listening, dialoguing, and assessing the real needs and desires of people living with disabilities. To read, “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’” (1 Corinthians 12:21) demands this. Living as the body of Christ insists upon nothing less. ■

Susan Windley-Daoust is associate professor of Theology at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota and author of *The Theology of the Body, Extended: The Spiritual Signs of Birth, Impairment, and Dying* (Lectio Publishing). She is the mother of five children, including one living with a disability.

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Subversives In Christ

**There's liberating, countercultural potential
when the black church and Anabaptist
traditions meet • by DREW G.I. HART**

I WAS RAISED in an African-American church, but as an adult I discovered Anabaptism. Since then I've sought to learn from both the wider black church and Anabaptist traditions, to the point that I now consider myself an "Anablacktivist."

Two experiences at my undergraduate Christian college helped propel me to see the significance of these two Christian streams. The first time was a chapel service, maybe a year after 9/11. The speaker, the Catholic priest John Dear, challenged us about U.S. violence and militarism—arguing that these weren't consistent with the life and teachings of Jesus. I leaned forward in agreement, captivated by his message, feeling that it rang true and faithful to Jesus.

AP photo by Jeff Roberson

Demonstrators raise their hands as police wearing riot gear move toward them in Ferguson, Mo. Hundreds of people had gathered in nonviolent protest of the killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown.



Then I noticed some movement in the darkened auditorium. Drove of students disruptively got up from their chairs and headed straight for the exits, in protest of the speaker and his “subversive” message that refused to affirm everything that the U.S. was doing in the world. I found myself deeply troubled by the defensive response of my (mostly white) Christian brothers and sisters to Dear’s thoroughly Jesus-shaped critiques of U.S. empire.

The second time was at a smaller “multicultural chapel service,” with just a few white peers present. The speaker spoke of U.S. history and present reality. He directly named white supremacy, racism as a system, and the experiences of black and brown people in the U.S. Once again I leaned forward, not wanting to miss a phrase. And again I watched many of the white students walk out.

As a follower of Christ, our speaker challenged us to live differently because of our faith in Jesus Christ. Yet something inherent in my peers’ socialization had them cling-

as it aligned itself with the prevailing social order. The original expectation that being a Christian meant living as Jesus did (1 John 2:6) became reserved for the monks and “extraordinary” Christians. Peace and nonviolence, inherent to Christian teaching for the first three centuries, was abandoned. A once marginalized minority that periodically endured persecution and oppression as a consequence for radical discipleship was now a church wielding centralized power in the social order, choosing its own preferences and comfort at the expense of the well-being of now-persecuted non-Christians.

Though the fourth-century emperor Constantine was just one factor that helped usher in this ecclesial shift in emphasis, he still represents the *image* and *type* that refashioned Jesus’ significance.

If Constantine symbolizes the shift of Christianity away from embodying Jesus’ life and teaching, then Christopher Columbus represents an equally traumatic shift. He is the *image* and *type* symbolizing the incarna-

In Anabaptist and black theological convergence, we see God revealed in Jesus, loving both Samaritans and enemies.

ing more to their white identity than to the Christian challenge. These two chapel experiences helped me contemplate the depth of the church’s troubles in the U.S. and its insubstantial Christian formation.

Scripture shows a new social configuration of relationships gathered around Jesus, grounded in justice, shalom, joy, truth, and love. However, it doesn’t take a sociologist or historian to question whether the church has ever lived that out as its norm. Some contend that Christians have often been the greatest advocates for war, racism, sexism, and poverty-inducing policies. The current division in the church in response to Ferguson and ongoing systemic anti-black violence has only provided more fuel for this criticism.

Two great shifts

These concerns are not without merit. Scores of books have been written on how Christianity shifted its dominant witness and teaching emphasis in the fourth century

tion of global white supremacy. The colonial moment of 1492 was the birth of a gradual reordering of all creation under the hierarchy of white male dominance. “Christian” Europe gazed at “the other” in a pseudo-scientific and pseudo-theological manner, categorizing Europeans (now labeled white) at the top of a racial hierarchy of superiority and Christian perfection. Western missionaries and military were deployed like two complementary hands collaborating around the world for the purposes of conquest and “civilizing” mission. Indigenous communities were violently colonized under the lordship of the white Jesus. The ignored yet ugly reality is that European colonization, the Holocaust in Germany, apartheid in South Africa, and America’s practices of manifest destiny, slavery, and white supremacy are all connected to Western Christian theology and practice.

In our current U.S. context, most churches are ill-prepared to respond to crises around police brutality, the irrational,

fear-induced police executions of black people, mass incarceration targeting black and brown youth, the pipeline to prison aided by defunding public schools in poor urban communities, and families struggling to survive on unlivable wages or vulnerable due to unjust immigration policies. Merely to change voting patterns is insufficient to address these crises: We need a subversive Jesus-shaped formation and identity that breaks ties with Christendom mindsets and white-dominated societal patterns, the very thing my college peers were unprepared to do.

Fortunately, there are Christian communities that were birthed on the underside of Christendom and white supremacy, precariously following Jesus for centuries in resistance.

Two of these traditions are especially fitting dialogue partners for the larger church in the United States. The 16th-century Protestant Reformation continued a Christendom orientation by practicing a magisterial, top-down approach to church that merely fragmented the church-state hierarchy, according to who occupied each territory. However, under their noses formed alternative communities that insisted on following Jesus according to his life and teaching in scripture, forming visible and voluntary churches no longer in partnership with the state. They refused to take up the sword against their enemies, and they found intimate solidarity with rebelling poor peasants that were economically exploited by state-church power. These outcasts were labeled “Anabaptists” by opponents for their refusal to recognize infant baptism (which was also the means by which infants were registered as citizens of the state).

Anabaptist communities represent a tradition that has sought to reject Constantine as lord and allow Jesus to have his rightful place, not only in their confessions but in their nonviolent embodiment of Christian life. During the Reformation thousands of Anabaptists were hunted down, drowned, burned at the stake, and otherwise tortured and killed. Entire communities were terrorized yet responded nonviolently.

Dangerous ideas

In 1619, the first African indentured servants were brought to North America for

After a half year's imprisonment for the “heresy” of her Anabaptist faith, Maria van Beckum was burned at the stake in 1544 in the Netherlands.



labor. By the 1660s, white supremacist slave codes were developed in every colony, identifying slavery with blackness. Anglican missionaries would eventually come through the growing colonies, easing any concerns that slave planters had around whether it was okay to keep baptized Africans enslaved. They insisted that Christianity would make better slaves if “absolute obedience” were enforced. From its inception until 1950, white supremacy was inseparably intertwined with Christian oversight, guidance, theology, and practice.

Yet right under the nose of white domination, enslaved Africans would “steal away” from mastering surveillance so they could meet Jesus in spirit and truth. Despite being taught that God legitimated the oppressive white supremacist social order, they encountered someone different. The Jesus Africans experienced was a friend, co-sufferer, liberator, and trickster that knew how to get over on powerful oppressors.

Jesus whispered dangerous ideas in their ears, telling them he had come “to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18-19). A prophetic and liberative expression of Christianity was born, helping their descendants survive white terrorism for centuries by fixing their eyes on Jesus. The black church today is multiple things, but at its best it carries on this tradition of connecting to the stone that the builders rejected while disbelieving the lie of white superiority and inviting everyone to join this new humanity that began with the crucified messiah.

A liberating convergence

With the challenges of Christendom and white supremacy blinding our past and present, the whole church ought to become careful learners of, and dialogue partners with, black and Anabaptist theology and faith. Together, we can learn that Jesus is the peacemaking God that identifies with the most vulnerable of society. God has chosen the vulnerable, poor, and oppressed to shame the dominant, wealthy, and violent people who have not honored the image of God in all people.

In Anabaptist and black theological convergence, we see God revealed in Jesus, loving both Samaritans and enemies. We realize God’s new social order is grounded

by a Jesus-shaped people that refuse to “lord over” others. Jesus, as the image of God and the revelation of true humanity, embodies the way for us to follow him, true participation in Christ’s own life.

Liberation and peacemaking are God’s response to an oppressive and violent social order. Jesus is God with us—though not *neutrally* with us: God has decisively taken on the form of the slave and has taken up the death of the revolutionaries and rejected ones of society, obediently clashing with this order to the point of accepting a public, state-sanctioned execution.

In doing so, Jesus became a divine affirmation of the humanity of all stigmatized and rejected people, now seen as true image bearers of the triune God. With a vision and understanding that there is no shalom without following the liberating Jesus, and no freedom without following the peacemaking Jesus, the convergence of black theology and Anabaptism shapes and molds us toward a model to which all the gospel narratives bear witness: a nonviolent, insurrectionist messiah.

I like to call the convergence of these two traditions Anablacktivism. It’s about Christian formation shaped by real people over several death-filled centuries, sparing Christianity from its own hamartia, or tragic flaw, from being violent and oppressive in character and orientation.

Thankfully, without knowing it, many churches have already accepted some of the formerly controversial insights of these traditions. However, in the midst of the current challenges that we face around domination in relation to race, class, gender, and fear-induced systemic violence in the church and society, it seems that our Christian formation must be radically reimagined.

Those from dominant cultures are now invited to learn from these and other Christian communities that have encountered the Jesus of jubilee and shalom from the underside of Western Christian history. Together, we’re invited to be transformed as we walk as one with the resurrected lord. ■

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We need a subversive Jesus-shaped formation and identity that breaks ties with Christendom mindsets and white-dominated societal patterns.

Despair is Optional

AS POPE FRANCIS prepares to release his encyclical on climate change, it's worth remembering exactly how far the conversation on religion and the environment has come in the past quarter-century.

When I wrote *The End of Nature* back in the late 1980s, there was very little religious environmentalism. Liberal churches believed that ecology was a subject to be addressed once you'd finished with war and poverty; conservative churches viewed it as a way station on the road to paganism. And Christians in general still reeled under the idea, propounded by Lynn White in an influential essay in *Science* magazine, that the Genesis call for dominion had led directly to the destruction we saw around us.

In those early days, there were a few wayfarers on this path. Thomas Berry, for instance, and even more important a pair of academics—

We're like the bad babysitter who takes the 2-year-old out for a tattoo and some piercings.

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim—who picked up his clues and sweated blood to assemble theologians from around the world and search every tradition for the roots of ecological thinking. Episcopal Power and Light—now Interfaith Power and Light—was an early and successful effort at congregational action; Shomrei Adamah (Guardians of the Earth) was an early effort in the Jewish community that has blossomed into many flowers.

More senior figures began to join. Patriarch Bartholomew, leader of 400 million Eastern Christians, became known as the “green patriarch” for his straightforward reckoning that environmental desecration was



Pope Francis in Tacloban, the Philippines, which was hit by a devastating typhoon in 2013.

AFP/Jiji

just that, a sin. Desmond Tutu has called climate change the “human rights challenge of our time.” Now the pope. “It is [humanity] who has slapped nature in the face,” Francis said. “We have in a sense taken over nature.”

There's pushback still, of course. When the pope made his remarks, a blogger at the conservative journal *First Things* announced, “Francis serves an environmentalist mindset that, unlike the traditional ethos of conservation, views [humanity] as a parasite.” Oof; them's fighting words. And from the corporatist, compromised center, there's the usual dismay at having to take sides. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, for instance, has done its best to blunt the growing movement for fossil-fuel divestment, arguing that “companies aren't the enemy.”

Happily, though, the momentum is clear. Denominations such as the United Church of Christ and the Unitarians have called for divestment; Methodist colleges and Catholic research universities are joining in. Religious people do understand that there are enemies in this fight—that the

companies who melted the Arctic and then moved to drill for yet more oil in its open waters meet any theological test you could devise for radical irresponsibility.

This movement unites young—who will have to live for decades with a changed planet—and old, who will have to go to their graves knowing that we've left a damaged planet behind. It reaches across ideology—the question of how and whether we evolved is less pressing than the fact that we're now running Genesis in reverse.

There's a streak of sadness that runs through this movement: Clearly we've failed to responsibly exercise dominion (we're the bad babysitter, who takes the 2-year-old out for a tattoo and some piercings). But there's also a streak of joy. Unlike secular environmentalists, we're entitled—if we work as hard as we know how to work—to imagine that some force will meet us halfway. Despair is optional, thank heaven. ■



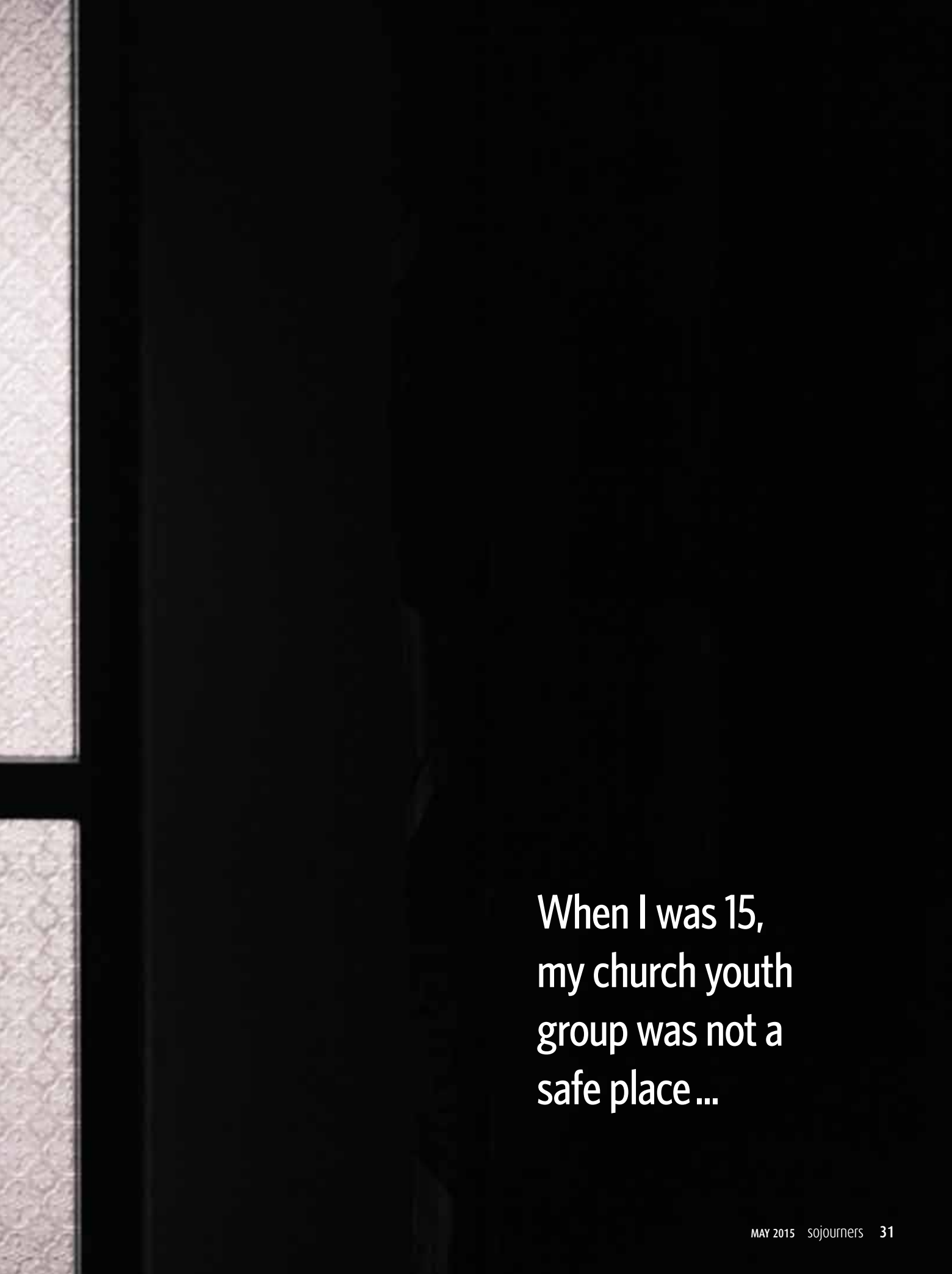
Bill McKibben is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont and founder of 350.org.

BLAMING THE VICTIM

**From “modest is hottest”
to misreading sexual violence
in the Bible, Christians
have a checkered history
regarding rape culture.**

by **LYNDSEY
CHRISTOFFERSEN**





When I was 15,
my church youth
group was not a
safe place ...

LIKE MOST YOUTH GROUPS, there were college-age volunteers who served as counselors and Bible study leaders.

One counselor, Paul, took it upon himself to constantly tell me I wore too much makeup, my clothes were too tight, and that I was a flirt. These actions took place in public for six months while other counselors and students watched and laughed. The interactions came to a head when he commented on my lipstick color and I snapped back at him. He grabbed me, forced me onto his lap, and told me I liked it.

At the time, I just thought Paul was creepy; I now recognize his behavior was sexual harassment. I also recognize that the other members of my youth group, including the leaders, saw his behavior and failed to intervene. Why did this happen? Both Paul's behavior and the leaders' silence belong to a larger set of attitudes in our culture—and churches—that allows sexual violence and sexual harassment to become normal, even expected, behaviors.

This set of attitudes is known as “rape culture.” When we fail to confront these toxic attitudes in our churches, we undermine our love for our neighbors, ignore the Bible, and misrepresent God as misogynistic.

The language of “rape culture” emerged in the 1970s as a way for feminists and sociologists to consider why acts of sexual assault were common within U.S. society; since then, it has become an increasingly important phrase for many people working with survivors of rape and domestic violence. While some have raised concerns about the language—fearing that it risks blaming culture instead of the perpetrator—using a phrase such as “rape culture” can help us recognize the broader cultural context surrounding individual acts.

To understand experiences like mine, we must first recognize that rape culture is not just about rape itself, but our reaction to all forms of sexual harassment. This includes:

- Publicly scrutinizing a victim's dress, history, and mental health
- Refusing to take rape and all forms of sexual harassment seriously
- Defining manhood as aggressive and womanhood as submissive
- Assuming only promiscuous women get raped and that men cannot be raped
- Teaching women to avoid getting raped instead of teaching men not to rape

One of the most blatant examples of these attitudes in the Christian community can be seen in Christian colleges that have usurped the federal Clery Act and Title IX mandates that require universities to report on-campus sexual assault statistics. *The New Republic* reported that one sexual assault survivor at Patrick Henry College was told by administrators, “The choices you make and the people you choose to associate with, the way you try to portray yourself, will affect how people treat you.” This same survivor was told that the clothes she wears are responsible for “the kinds of ideas it puts in men's minds.”

This response is not isolated; The Huffington Post reported that students at Bob Jones University were told to call their rapists and ask for forgiveness. And, at the blog xoJane.com, a sexual assault survivor at Pensacola Christian College wrote that she was implored to repent for her ex-fiancé assaulting her.

“Modest is hottest”

It is easy to be outraged by this flagrant disregard for sexual assault victims, but rape culture within the church exists well beyond the campuses of Christian colleges. These harmful practices include how we teach young women about modesty and how we interpret scripture passages containing sexual assault. Though subtle, these practices are equally dangerous.

The modesty message presented to young women in churches often utilizes the same rhetoric that is used to justify sexual assault.

Female bodies are often called “a stumbling block” that can cause Christian men to sin. Slogans such as “modest is hottest” teach girls to cover up and obscure their figures, implying that the sexual thoughts of men are the responsibility of women. Many Christian sex books claim that men are naturally more sexual, aggressive, and dominant than women. Instead of teaching men not to rape or encouraging others to intervene in threatening situations, women are taught to avoid getting raped by making themselves less of a “temptation.”

Victim blaming also appears to be the norm in many Christian communities. *Every Young Woman's Battle*, a best-selling Christian modesty book, proclaims: “You teach people how to treat you. Either you teach them to treat you with respect or you teach them to treat you with disrespect. Whether you intend to or not, the way you dress—modestly covering the most visually stimulating parts of your body or immodestly revealing as much of your body as you can get away with—sends others a message.” Similarly, some Christian bloggers remind young women that “whatever bait you use determines the type of fish you'll catch.” Both are examples of ways that people connected to the church sometimes publicly scrutinize women's dress and justify subsequent mistreatment.

Victim blaming also creates a false dichotomy in which women are viewed as either pure or promiscuous, a good Christian girl or a temptress, a virgin or a whore. Not only does this devalue women who are sexually active or dress in a certain way, but it leads to a painful silence in the church. Those labeled as promiscuous, temptresses, or whores are unlikely to have a voice if they are sexually assaulted; instead, they're blamed for supposedly bringing the assault upon themselves. For these women, the church is no longer a safe space.

Trivializing the sin of sexual violence

Faulty biblical interpretation can further enforce rape culture. Genesis 16, 2 Samuel 11, and Genesis 29 contain stories of the

sexual assault of Hagar, Bathsheba, and Jacob, yet the sexual-assault aspect of these stories is typically ignored.

The focus of Genesis 16 is often on how Abram and Sarai utilized their servant Hagar as a surrogate because they did not trust God's promise for an heir. But a second look at Genesis 16 shows that Hagar closely resembles contemporary victims of human trafficking. According to the Polaris Project, human trafficking victims are often undocumented, homeless or runaway, impoverished, and oppressed. Similarly, Hagar was an underage slave from a foreign land working for an older couple. Sarai gives her to Abram like a piece of property, and Hagar is then beaten after she is impregnated. Hagar is resentful of being pregnant and fearful enough to run away.

In 2 Samuel 1-12 we read how King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then killed her husband. Yet it seems Bathsheba thought she could not say no to the king. "When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." That God's displeasure is only directed toward David suggests that Bathsheba was a recognized victim in this situation. David initiated the initial sexual liaison with Bathsheba, and then took away her resources by killing her husband, effectively coercing her into an unwanted marriage.

Finally, in Genesis 29, we read that Jacob was promised to marry Rachel, but was tricked into having sex with her sister Leah instead. Most interpretations of the passage focus on how Jacob was fooled into working longer for his father-in-law, but little is ever said about Jacob's lack of consent. Jacob was placed in a dark tent and purposefully led to believe he was sleeping with and marrying a different person than the woman who was actually waiting for him. In other words, Jacob's father-in-law forced him into unwanted sex.



At the time, I just thought Paul was creepy; I now recognize his behavior was sexual harassment.

By glossing over the sexual misconduct in these biblical stories, the church misses an important opportunity to talk about the boundaries of appropriate sexual behavior and risks trivializing the sin of sexual violence. After all, if we overlook sexual assault in the Bible, what will prompt us to address sexual assault in our own communities? Worse still, the church's silence can leave Christians to believe that Bathsheba should not have been bathing on her roof, that Hagar did not mind sleeping with Abram because it was culturally expected for a slave to sleep with her master, and that Jacob was only betrayed. Or, in other words, Bathsheba was asking for it, Hagar does not matter because she is a slave, and rape can not happen to men such as Jacob.

Though there is no magic solution to address decades of engrained norms about sexual violence, there are ways the church can set itself apart from the world when it comes to our thinking about sexual assault and culpability.

First, the church can emphasize that each person is responsible for his or her own sin. Matthew 5:28 makes it pretty clear that lust is only the sin of the person who is lusting. To be biblically and contextually accurate, Christian communities should stop making women's appearance responsible for men's actions. If modesty is taught, lessons should focus on passages such as 1 Timothy 2:10, which instructs that women should be clothed "with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God." Clothing should enable us to do God's work. The focus should be, "Can you work in a soup kitchen like that?" not "What will boys think of my outfit?"

Second, the church can be candid about sexual sin in the Bible and our communities. The Bible is made up of stories of humans making deeply flawed decisions. All humans need God's redemption and love. It is important to acknowledge the sexual assaults described in the Bible and use them as starting points for discussions on consent, sin, and sexual violence. Churches should be a safe space for survivors of harassment and violence. Survivors will know they can receive support regardless of their attire, gender, or sexual history.

When Paul forced me onto his lap, he was pulled aside by my youth pastor's wife. He was asked to leave and never showed up to any youth events after that. I wonder how things would have turned out for me and other girls in the youth group if she had not intervened.

One thing is certain, however: Challenging rape culture starts with being accountable for our own actions, and it is continued by making churches a safe space for everyone. It means we have to rethink what we teach in our churches and be willing to step up in defense of the vulnerable. ■

Lyndsey Christoffersen, cofounder of the Long Beach Human Trafficking Task Force, writes on issues of human trafficking, gender, community engagement, and the intersection of faith and politics.

utilizes the same rhetoric that is used to justify sexual assault.





Yearning to Breathe Free

Churches on the U.S.-Mexico border are making a statement about immigration—by working together to meet humanitarian need.

by **DAVID C. CRAMER** • photos by **JENNIFER WHITNEY**

“I DON’T BLAME the Border Patrol. I blame our country,” Sister Norma Pimentel told Rep. Jim McGovern on a hot afternoon in McAllen, Texas, last August.

“It’s like a burning building,” explained Pimentel, director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, “and we’re sending them back into it.”

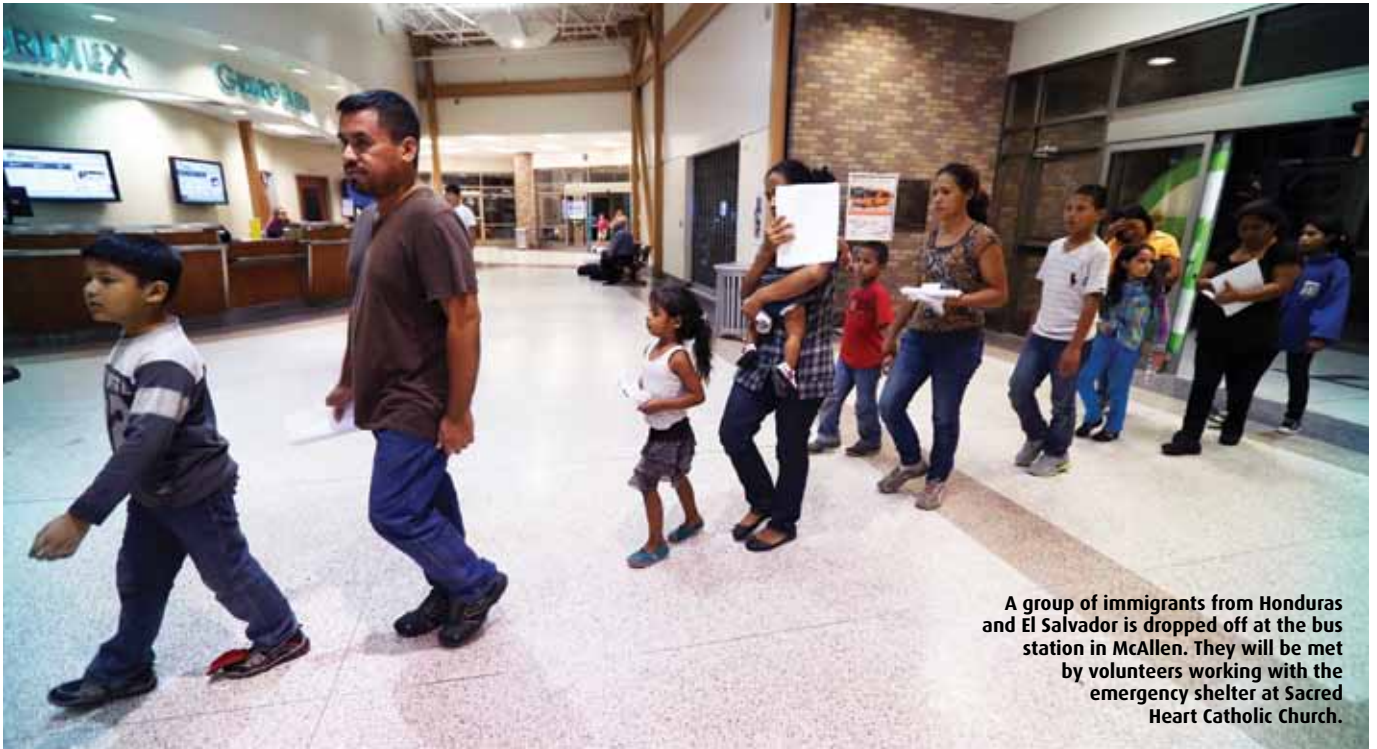
Pimentel was describing the U.S. policy of deporting Central American refugees back to their home countries, while Rep. McGovern (D-Mass.) nodded in agreement. He had just visited the Border Patrol central processing facility, and Pimentel was leading him on a tour of the humanitarian respite center at Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

The difference was striking: At the processing facility, children were detained in what McGovern described as “cages”; at the respite center, Catholic Charities staff and volunteers provided food, showers, clothing, medical exams, and an air-conditioned place for refugees to wait for a bus ride to meet family members living in the U.S.

Because of large influx of refugees last summer, initially those who could verify that they had relatives already living in the U.S. were processed by Border Patrol and released with papers allowing them to travel by bus to reunite with family, where they would await an immigration hearing—and possible deportation. But after being dropped off at the McAllen bus station by the Border Patrol, many waited for hours for their bus to arrive—often with nothing but the clothes on their back and papers in hand.

**“Not since the
Irish potato
famine have we
had refugees like this.”**

After arriving from the bus station, a young boy and his mother pray with a volunteer at the emergency shelter at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in McAllen, Texas.



A group of immigrants from Honduras and El Salvador is dropped off at the bus station in McAllen. They will be met by volunteers working with the emergency shelter at Sacred Heart Catholic Church.



A 9-year-old and his mother wait to register as they arrive at Sacred Heart from the bus station.



A 7-month-old who arrived with her mother from Honduras is bathed and treated for impetigo and an upper respiratory infection by volunteers at Sacred Heart.



A staff member packs medicine for immigrants passing through the shelter.

In contrast to the divisive rhetoric about immigration on the national stage, there was no resistance from church members to the relief efforts.



Sister Norma Pimentel, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, works at the emergency shelter at Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

That's where Catholic Charities stepped in. In June 2014, they converted the Sacred Heart parish hall—normally used for community events and wedding receptions—into a humanitarian respite center to help with the growing numbers of refugees wandering around the nearby bus station. Sister Leticia Benavides, a therapist with Catholic Charities who helped direct the relief work at Sacred Heart last summer, estimated that 5,000 refugees came through their doors in their first two months of operation alone. At the peak of the refugee influx last July, the respite center was serving 200 refugees each day.

Many refugees were not so lucky. During the 2014 fiscal year, the U.S. deported more than 120,000 Central Americans back to their home countries, according to a year-end report issued by the Department of Homeland Security. Those deported faced the prospect of returning to the very conditions that caused them to flee their home countries in the first place: political instability, gang violence, and abject poverty.

Politicians in Washington and Austin framed the crisis as an “immigration invasion” of “criminal aliens,” but Texas immigration lawyer Susan Nelson pointed to government data suggesting it would have been better described as a humanitarian refugee crisis. Data provided by the U.S. Customs and Border Protections showed that apprehensions of families and unaccompanied minors on the southwest border

rose from 14,855 in 2013 to 68,445 in 2014—an increase of more than 350 percent. This data also showed that those apprehended in 2014 were overwhelmingly *not* from Mexico, but instead from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, where the U.S. “war on drugs” has pushed violent gangs and drug cartels from Colombia and Mexico.

Nelson explained that economically driven immigration patterns typically involve parents traveling to the U.S. and later sending for their kids to rejoin them. In the recent crisis, however, parents have been using their life savings to send their kids alone to the U.S., a pattern that points to desperation, not economic motives. “This is not about immigrants stealing jobs,” said Nelson. She described the terror many Central American children face in their home countries: “Kids are being raped and murdered,” she explained. “They are not safe at home or school.”

WHILE ARGUMENTS about immigration reform kept Congress from taking any steps toward meaningful action, politics didn't paralyze the work of the respite center. Catholic Charities has no political leaning, explained Benavides; its purpose is solely to meet humanitarian needs of anyone in crisis. But she believed that by putting aside individual political views and keeping a singular focus on helping families in need, the respite center could send a message about the possibilities of collaboration across the political

spectrum and provide what she called “a great example of ecumenism at work.”

She was right. As Catholic Charities started coordinating the relief efforts, a number of churches and nonprofit organizations joined in: Nearby Calvary Baptist Church washed towels and blankets, while the local United Methodists responded to any urgent needs that arose, such as last-minute supply runs. The Salvation Army sent crews to make meals especially suited to the dietary needs of the dehydrated refugees, and the international organization Save the Children provided a supervised play area for the refugee children so their parents could rest. The Food Bank of the Rio Grande Valley stored donated food, clothing, and toiletries until needed at Sacred Heart.

Even the broader community got involved: The city of McAllen provided temporary shower facilities in the Sacred Heart parking lot and a police presence on the grounds, while the city of Mission loaned 50 cots that filled two air-conditioned tents provided by the Texas Emergency Medical Task Force. In contrast to the divisive rhetoric about immigration on the national stage, Benavides noted that there was no resistance from church members to the relief efforts.

ON THE DAY I visited the respite center, volunteer coordinator Alma Révész briefed volunteers who traveled from as far away as Orlando, Fla., and Steamboat Springs, Colo. Other volunteers included an Episcopal youth group from San Antonio, a Mennonite family from Waco, and a group of Catholic sisters from Corpus Christi.

Révész told the volunteers that Catholic Charities provided refugees with basic necessities as well as a three minute long-distance phone call to their home country and another call to their destination family. She noted that everyone they served had already been processed and temporarily released by the Border Patrol. However, she pointed out that even if someone were to arrive at the center without processing papers, there would be no other Christian option than to provide them with food, clothing, and a shower before sending them on their way. With a smile she referred to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25: “When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat.”

And while Révész's focus was on serving

rather than making a political statement, it didn't take long for word to get out about the work at Sacred Heart. Along with Rep. McGovern, a range of people from conservatives Glenn Beck and Ted Cruz to actress and activist America Ferrera have visited Sacred Heart, including major media outlets such as *Time*, NPR, and *USA Today*.

"Hopefully they feel like there's some compassion for them and that there are people who feel for the journey that they've been on and for the struggle they're fighting to preserve their lives and the lives and future of their own children," Ferrera said of the refugees she met at the respite center. "And I would want to say more so to all the mothers and fathers and parents who are safely in this country to really think about what it would be like to be in their shoes."

Salvation Army volunteer Michelle Baldwin described the refugee crisis as a historic moment for the U.S. "Not since the Irish potato famine have we had refugees like this," Baldwin said. "This is history." Baldwin, her adult son Larry, and fellow Salvation Army volunteer Dee Dee Martin drove through the night from their homes near the Texas-Oklahoma border to volunteer in the Sacred Heart kitchen. In her 12 years as director of the Food Bank in Cooke County, Texas, Baldwin said, nothing prepared her for what she found at Sacred Heart: "The children have endured unimaginable hardship. The look in a pregnant woman's eyes is pure terror. These people are desperate for hope. Here they get a shower, a meal, a doctor, hope."

Hope is precisely what Catholic Charities provided for Digna Rodriguez and her young family. Rodriguez made the treacherous journey from Honduras with her two daughters, ages 2 and 5. After the Border Patrol found her in labor, they called Catholic Charities, who rushed her to the hospital where she gave birth to a son.

During his tour, Rep. McGovern asked Pimentel if he could speak with Rodriguez. Through a translator, she told him that her 5-day-old son was named Esteban, that she and her family were taking a bus that very afternoon to reunite with cousins in Kentucky, and that her husband was still living in Honduras. As they talked, her son slept quietly under the close supervision of Save the Children volunteers, while her daughters ate

soup and fruit served by the Salvation Army volunteers. Her 5-year-old daughter smiled politely and offered hugs to volunteers.

THE MEDIA'S SPOTLIGHT turned to the refugee crisis last summer, but significant numbers of unaccompanied minor children have migrated to the U.S. at least since 2008. The numbers have fluctuated, and media attention has waned since last year, but the humanitarian emergency at the U.S. border is far from over: 2015 is projected to see the second-highest number of Border Patrol apprehensions of children and families (after the previous year's all-time record).

And politically, little has changed: Though President Obama announced a plan for executive action on immigration in November that would have deferred the threat of sudden deportation for many immigrant families, some conservatives in Congress have hailed the president's approach as "illegal and unconstitutional amnesty." In February, a federal judge in Texas issued an injunction against Obama's actions one day before they would have gone into effect. Though the administration promptly appealed the judge's ruling, real change in U.S. border policy seems likely to remain elusive for some time.

Meanwhile, Sacred Heart remains committed to its mission. "We seek out the hurt and abused, the isolated and alienated, and victims of alcohol and drug addictions," says its website. "We commit ourselves to enhancing the dignity of life by working for peace and justice." The respite center is still serving refugees at the Texas-Mexico border and plans to continue for the foreseeable future—an outpost for a Christian alternative in a nation immobilized by political bickering.

"Being Christian, we have only one response," said Baldwin. "We treat these people with the humane compassion that every human deserves." Jesus once contrasted his disciples with political leaders who claim to be "benefactors." In south Texas, that contrast could not be starker. ■

David C. Cramer is a doctoral candidate in theology and ethics at Baylor University and, with his wife, Andrea, and their two young children, is a member of Hope Fellowship Mennonite Church in Waco, Texas.

Sister Benavides estimated that 5,000 refugees came through the doors in their first two months of operation.

This Is Praying

You hear a voice speaking
about a bird dragging its dark universe
of feathers across your yard,
and you realize it must be you

telling the boy how you carried its body
beyond the ambit of your dogs.
One eye, round as a coin,
fixing fear upon you, the other,

half shut. How the bird hauled
its body back into your yard,
dying with a will you could only
admire. *Am I the bird?*, the boy asks.

You can barely see his face
through the slot, eight inches
from the bottom of the door.
Pie-hole, they call it. You know

he cannot be cured of his crime.
But you can't help yourself—
this language your body speaks
as you crouch, palms, knees

pressed against the prison floor.
He is nineteen, has an aunt, a mother,
both illiterate, both a hundred miles
away. No one knows why

they have stopped visiting.
You imagine his body, each Sunday,
learning again of their absence.
You imagine his organs, his bones

liquefying inside of his skin.
You imagine his eyes
staring out from his own
gathered flesh. It is three days

before Christmas and you have
ten minutes to spread something
like joy. You think of Vermeer,
the woman in blue, refusing
to obey the physics of light.
You do not even know
the source of your own voice.
Am I the bird? There is a window

beyond the canvas but Vermeer
thinks a shadow will be
distracting. You tell him—
the boy—about your dream.

How your mind had been
like a living thing nailed down,
trembling with what ifs
and how comes. And then

these words: *I hear you,*
I hear you breathing. A sound
coming from within and
beyond. Not a voice, exactly.

More like a gentle pressing
of heat, the perfect distance
from flame, settling you
immediately into sleep.

And now this voice telling him:
you hear him, you hear him
breathing, telling him:
it is a beautiful sound.

Lisa Dordal, author of *Commemoration*
(Finishing Line Press), teaches at
Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn.

Image by Maulashree Shanbhag



By Gareth Higgins

A Newsfeed of **Fear**

You wouldn't know it from the headlines, but things are getting better.

I GREW UP terrified, my childhood catechized by the violence in Northern Ireland, each week a litany of murder. I grew used to the idea that killing was the story of our lives. This, of course, was not true—there was also beauty and friendship all around us, all the time, not to mention eventually a peace process that has delivered extraordinary cooperation between former sworn enemies.

But the way we learned to tell the story—from political and cultural leaders, religion, and the media—emphasized the darkness. It's been a long and still ongoing journey for me to discern how to honor real suffering while overcoming the lie that things are getting worse.

Today, many of us are living with a fear that seems hard to shake. Horrifying, brutal videos, edited for maximum sinister impact, showing up in our newsfeeds are only the most recent example of how terror seems to blend into our everyday lives.

But things are not as bad as we think. What social scientists call the “availability heuristic”

Chris Clor/Getty Images

been declining over time, and we are living in what is probably the most peaceful era human beings have ever known. But it's true.

While the posture of ancient communities toward each other was often kill or be killed, now most of us are peaceable, if distant, neighbors. Animal cruelty was a popular form of entertainment until not very long ago: Today we prosecute animal abuse. The roughly 40 executions every year in the U.S. are each an indictment of the legal codification of vengeance, but show progress compared to the hundreds of crucifixions in a day in some parts of the Roman Empire.

We are living in the most peaceful era that human beings have ever known.

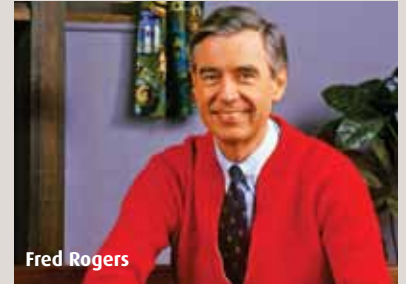
And the anti-capital punishment movement is bringing us closer to achieving abolition.

Terrible things still happen, of course, but, according to psychologist Steven Pinker, they are happening in fewer places to fewer people than ever. In his extraordinarily important book *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, Pinker suggests that we believe things are worse than they are because of the availability heuristic and our tendency to see only the immediate circumstances around us, because traditional storytelling forms have evolved to emphasize drama or crisis as the hook for an audience, and because we are not trained to think contextually about our own lives. All this leads to a situation where the countless people worldwide who experienced the benefits of peace processes yesterday will not make spectacular headlines, but a school shooting will—even though overall violence is declining.

Such decline has occurred, argues Pinker, partly because of social factors such as the rise of the nation state, the empowerment of women, and the emergence of the novel as a storytelling form that contributed to the growth of empathy for the lives of others. In short, humanity is growing up. While the full implications of human rights revolutions have not yet been achieved, and sometimes stumble a step backward, the path seems,

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New & Noteworthy



Fred Rogers

A GOOD NEIGHBOR

Children's television host (and Presbyterian minister) Fred Rogers was known for his gentle, soft-spoken manner. Michael G. Long argues in *Peaceful Neighbor: Discovering the Countercultural Mister Rogers* that Rogers was also a radical, imbuing his show with nonviolence and care for creation. Westminster John Knox Press

BE A MAN

The creators of *Miss Representation* bring us *The Mask You Live In*, a portrait of masculinity in the U.S. through the eyes of young boys, educators, and social scientists. The documentary argues that hyper-masculine cultural messages manifest in violent, isolating, emotionally stunting ways. The Representation Project

ALL IN THE FAMILY

For 10 years Patricia Raybon and her daughter Alana didn't talk about faith—because Alana had become a practicing Muslim. In *Undivided: A Muslim Daughter, Her Christian Mother, Their Path to Peace*, they tell about their search together for healing and understanding. W Publishing Group

AMERICANA MOSES

In *Leave Some Things Behind*, the Steel Wheels use mandolin, fiddle, and bass to bolster a lyrical theme of "Exodus." The foursome reflects on the joy and consequences of leaving home for an abstract promised land, singing, "It makes a difference where you go. It makes you different where you go." thesteelwheels.com

helps explain why we humans find it difficult to accurately predict probability. In short, we guess the likelihood of something happening based on how easily we can recall examples of something similar having happened before. Because of this, folk who get a lot of "information" from mainstream media may tend to overestimate the murder rate: Most of us have seen vastly more killing on TV than would ever compute to an accurate estimate of real-world rates of killing.

Globalization and cyberspace bring more images and stories than our brains can handle, blending them with our lives to the extent that we consciously have to work to create boundaries between our screens and our psyches. One consequence is that people are skeptical when told that violence has

Rich Songs of Economic Despair

OUT WHERE Kentucky meets West Virginia, you'll find one of America's cultural seedbeds, where Scotch-Irish immigrant traditions took root in the New World. But on her debut album, *American Middle Class*, singer-songwriter Angaleena Presley, a daughter of the Kentucky mountains (and no kin to The King), paints a heartbreaking picture of what Appalachia has become.

The people of this region were once mostly self-sufficient subsistence farmers. In the early 20th century, they were drafted into the coal mines but brought their pride and independence with them, waging often-bloody battles to establish the United Mine Workers of America. For over a century now, the region's economic fate has been hostage to the ups and downs of the energy market. As a result, the coal fields have become one of the poorest parts of the country.

The music that flourished in this region became, along with that of low-country African Americans, one



Rick Diamond/Getty Images

Singer-songwriter Angaleena Presley paints a heartbreaking picture of what Appalachia has become.

of the two great pillars of American popular music. So many country music greats have come from here that Kentucky has a "Country Music Highway Museum" just to honor all the stars (Loretta Lynn, Ricky Skaggs, Billy Ray Cyrus, Keith Whitley, and many others) born along U.S. 23.

In short, this part of Appalachia is sort of the Mississippi Delta for white people: A place of dire economic poverty and vast cultural riches, where the art and spirit of a people has found its most intense expression.

Angaleena Presley seems to

know all this. The woman from Beauty, Ky., with the perfect country music name is a pure product of hardcore Appalachia. A miner's daughter, during high school she would cut class, drive to the old house that Loretta Lynn wrote about in *Coal Miner's Daughter*, and try to write songs.

Since then Presley has knocked around Nashville as a songwriter and a member of the Pistol Annies country girl group. Now comes *American Middle Class*, an intensely personal statement of love, loyalty, and loss, all about the place she calls home.

There is autobiography—two songs, "Knocked Up" and "Drunk," Presley says, are mostly the short version of her first marriage—and a lot of sharp-eyed social documentary, only a little of it hailing the virtues of the proud, self-reliant mountaineer. The title track starts with a recording of Presley's father talking about life in the mines. She sings "daddy never crossed the picket line, it was hard but we made it through" and goes on to praise "the hardworking God-loving members of the American middle class."



But most of the strong stuff on this record is about the plague of drug abuse and despair that has swept the mountains in the past 15 years. As the coal jobs have left, they've often been replaced by disability payments and drug abuse. When Presley looks around her hometown now (in "Dry County Blues"), she sees, "a car full of pill-billies looking to score ... [and] good Christian women locking their front doors, praying their daughters don't turn into meth whores." In "Pain Pills" we meet a high school football hero who dies of an overdose, a strip-mine worker drinking on the job, and a woman running to the pill mill after getting out of jail. Angaleena Presley doesn't have any solutions for what ails Appalachia. So far, nobody does. And that's not her job anyhow. What she does give us is a clear picture of what's being lost, and at what cost. It's an American tragedy, as if we needed another. ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.

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overall, irreversible.

Yet the news does not usually tell us this. Crisis rules. Television news, radio bulletins, front pages, tweets, and status updates alike teach us that violence is typical, not an exception. This is not to advocate pretending that violence does not exist—but today's horrifying headlines do not contradict the long-term positive trend lines.

The news media's addiction to spectacular violence might not be so insidious if it were accompanied by the kind of empathy and compassion that serve to reduce violence in the real world. Editors may feel caught in a system that has to balance public interest with public lust—photos of nip

How do we honor real suffering while overcoming the lie that things are getting worse?

slips will sell more papers than a cover-page investigation about how sexual violence is decreasing. But that system depends on consumers like you and me for its sustenance, so part of the solution is an audience that is willing to switch off and demand better.

A MODEST proposal for engaging the news without being eaten by it might include choosing not to consume its most obvious and egregious proponents of dehumanization. Last year I abstained from reading news websites unless there was something I consciously decided to learn about. Tuning out reduced my fear, and I think made me a more effective activist, because my body and spirit were not being driven by the spectacle-driven agenda of clickbait. Instead, I was beginning to be still long enough to hear the call to long-term preventive action to reduce violence, the kind of bearing witness that offers dignity to those who suffer rather than vengeance or tabloid garishness, and the sound of real hope overcoming the noise that falsely claims that the darkness is winning.

But there's also a fine line between disciplined listening (or refusal to listen) and self-righteousness. Switching off ranting



From *Leviathan*

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

THE EXTRAORDINARY film *Leviathan* takes place in a tiny coastal town on the other side of the world, but it relates to all our dreams and fears.

A man is tormented by bureaucracy, as the authorities try to take his house. He has an unhealthy relationship with alcohol, and a very unhealthy one with his partner. He works on people's cars, does favors for people who ask him, and tries to raise his son as best he can. And he's caught between the wheels of historic oppression and emerging forms.

Leviathan, this year's Russian nominee for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar, is a work of uncommon cinematic bravery, for the people who made it take on the corruption of their current political masters. Vladimir Putin appears briefly, as a portrait looming over the office of the mayor trying to take our hero's house. But the graft, selfishness, and cruelty of Putin's imperial reign are palpably present in the mayor, who has been fighting the householder for years to get his property, for reasons that owe more than a little to the legacy of Soviet-era patriotic ideology. Communism has been replaced by a heady mix of nationalistic pride and elitism religion, whose boundaries are enforced with no mercy. Pussy Riot's punk prayer gets a mention in a priest's litany of things that are undermining Mother Russia. It's the

same old story, there and everywhere—keep the nation pure, confuse spirit and law, and wreck your own life by denying the glories of human diversity.

The brilliance of *Leviathan* is that it tells three stories at once—it's worth watching three times, each through a different lens. It's a story of small-town greed and individual brokenness, as one man struggles against another's violence when it is already hard to hold body and soul together. It's a political epic, painted on the massive canvas of contemporary Russia's struggles to free itself from the shadow of Stalinist repression. And it's a mythic parable, explicitly invoking the story of Job as a template for what happens to our protagonist.

When the lead character's crisis becomes a tragedy, a priest tells him that Job had to resign himself to his fate before he could become content. It's an ambivalent message, because the messenger represents an ambivalent institution, but it also has a kernel of truth about suffering. *Leviathan* shows courage in naming the evil of the powers that be. It is more interested in exposing them than offering easy answers. ■

Gareth Higgins curates www.moviesandmeaning.com, a festival of stories and light that make our lives better.

anchors or ignoring Islamophobic gossip columnists may be a step in the right direction, but it's hardly Gandhi's salt march. We need to engage deeper questions about how our participation or nonparticipation in infotainment can impact the world. And we need to support good journalists who bring more light than heat—who often feel isolated in their attempts to do something other than repeat yesterday's snark or color within our culture's lines of moral opprobrium, condemnation, and revenge. We should read and listen to them, thank them when they do well, and offer encouraging critique when they don't.

For example, mass shootings should be an occasion for investigation of an ill-functioning mental health care system, the erosion of community, and economic inequality, because we know that strong social bonds correlate with violence reduction. The amount of sexual violence likely will not be decreased by sensationalizing it, but real progress might be achieved if more reporting was focused on prevention and healing. Shaming gossip about the public mistakes of famous people can be replaced by a humane conversation about how celebrity depends on the audience propping it up. But these are only symptoms of a wider malaise.

Our culture has been hoodwinked by the idea that we're living in the center of crisis, when actually we're in the midst of the evolution of hope. It is true that each killing is a universe of loss to the victim's loved ones, and solidarity with the suffering of others is not only part of the privilege of being human but a step on the path to the world in which no one will have to suffer that way again. But whether it is the misstatement that the 20th century was the bloodiest in human history (World War II is only the ninth-most-lethal conflict per capita in history and the others of the 10 worst all preceded 1900), or the latest hate crime being read as part of an epidemic, falsely interpreting the present creates inertia about the future. And those of us who are suffering will not be removed from harm's way or helped to heal by sensationalist retellings of only the most horrific parts of our stories. The stories we tell will heal us, or destroy us.

Catering to (and nurturing) fear and pessimism is a function of one of the most dangerous beliefs: that violence can bring

order out of chaos, cleansing the world for the righteous (what Walter Wink called the myth of redemptive violence). Instead, violence merely generates more fear, pessimism, and conditions from which more violence may grow. Our journalism—and our personal social media use—needs to be resourced to deal in context, compassion, detail, and pause. More important, healing the world requires reframing the story as one in which, while we lament real wounds and work to prevent them, things are getting better, and we can make them better still.

This is as true for the creative arts of television, cinema, literature, and music as much as it is for their nonfiction counterparts. But the news does not begin with the flashing

red strip across the bottom of the screen. It begins in *your* mind, and the story you're telling about yourself. It catalyzes with your loved ones and neighbors to create a bigger story. It connects everywhere you go, on foot or chair or online. It is immensely powerful, although most of us aren't conscious of this, most of the time. The way you tell the story about your world will actually co-create that world. The myth of redemptive violence needs to be replaced. Imagining a new myth is a privilege. It is also our responsibility. ■

Gareth Higgins curates the festival of stories, light, and making a better world at www.moviesandmeaning.com.

Reviewed by Molly Marsh

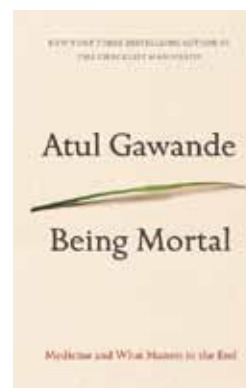
WHAT MATTERS MOST?

***Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*, by Atul Gawande.**
Metropolitan Books.

EARLY IN *Being Mortal*, surgeon Atul Gawande tells the story of Joseph Lazaroff, a patient with incurable prostate cancer. His medical team pursued multiple treatments, including emergency radiation and surgery, but Lazaroff ultimately died. What most struck Gawande later was that he and the team avoided talking honestly about Lazaroff's choices—even when they knew he couldn't be cured.

"We could never bring ourselves to discuss the larger truth about his condition or the ultimate limits of our capabilities, let alone what might matter most to him as he neared the end of his life," Gawande writes. "The chances that he could return to anything like the life he had even a few weeks earlier were zero. But admitting this and helping him cope with it seemed beyond us."

Why is that? For one, Gawande's medical training didn't prepare him for dealing with frailty, aging, or dying, he writes. He and his peers were taught to "fix," to heal people with expertise, tools, and tests. Like most doctors, he approached his patients' challenges as medical problems to solve, whether they



were the accumulations of old age or terminal illness.

But a decade into his practice, Gawande is arguing for a change. *Being Mortal* is a conversation about why and how. For all its triumphs, medicine doesn't—and shouldn't—hold all the answers when it comes to aging and death.

Gawande looks at aging and societal shifts over the last decades, particularly the development of nurs-

ing homes (hospitals needed a place to put elderly patients who had nowhere else to go) and their limitations—something he saw through the experience of his grandmother-in-law, Alice Hobson.

Hobson's life in a nursing home was safe, but with little privacy or autonomy to make even basic decisions for herself, she felt trapped and insignificant. Despite declining health, she felt she had more to do and give, but no pathways existed to express those desires. It was as if she had stopped being fully human and merely occupied a body.

"We've succumbed to a belief that, once you lose your physical independence, a life

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SOMETHING TRANSCENDENT

Rosemarie Freeney Harding describes the reaction of her friend—Albany, Georgia-based civil rights leader Marion King—to a physical attack.

IN THE SUMMER of 1962, in the middle of the Albany campaign, Marion and I were both pregnant. During the campaign, Marion often visited movement workers who were jailed in local facilities throughout Dougherty and Terrell counties—taking them food, checking on conditions where they were kept, relaying messages. On one occasion as she exited a jail, a policeman who felt she was not moving fast enough kicked her in the back so that she fell to the ground. Marion fell so hard that she lost the baby.

Some of us went to see her at her home when she was released from the hospital. As we waited our shock and pain mixed with anger. ... We naturally assumed she would share our sense of indignation and assault. But something else was happening. When Marion came into the room, walking slowly so as not to exacerbate her pain, there was something in her face. A kind of light. Like a victory, a resplendence. It's hard to explain, because it wasn't prideful and it wasn't false. It helped to quiet us—our anger, our judgment. And we recognized it.

Many of us in the movement had the feeling at certain moments that what we were experiencing in our freedom work was something more than just the immediate events. It was in fact something transcendent—capable of transforming us, our adversaries, and our entire society. Marion's countenance and her conversation in that moment reminded us of *that* quality of the movement.

Clearly she had struggled with how to respond to the trauma she had experienced: Not only had she been attacked, but the child she was carrying had died. And it's hard for me now to explain her actions in terms that do not sound like romantic idealism or a spiritual naïveté. But what I am trying to emphasize is how deeply and how seriously many people were grappling with the meaning of nonviolence during the movement days and how Marion's reaction had

a context and the support of a community of people who understood, or at least were trying to understand, the potential of compassion and nonviolence to transform individuals and societies.

Marion never condemned the man who had beaten her and, in fact, she directed our conversation

to other matters and even to laughter. What she showed us in her refusal to disparage or judge the man who had spurned her so violently was a kind of triumph that did not come from a spirit of revenge or even of justifiable anger. Indeed, the words I am using to describe it—"victory," "triumph"—may mislead in the sense that they imply a success *over* an opponent. What we saw and felt in Marion's presence, in her response to the trauma she was living through, had the *excellent* quality of victory, but where otherwise a *dominance* might have been, there was instead *dominion*—a kind of understanding, a place where something very meaningful was shared. ■

From Remnants: A Memoir of Spirit, Activism, and Mothering, by Rosemarie Freeney Harding with Rachel Elizabeth Harding. Copyright Duke University Press, 2015.



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Catholic
Theological
Union

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of worth and freedom is simply not possible,” Gawande writes. What’s worse, no one “sit[s] down with you to figure out what living a life really means to you under the circumstances, let alone help[s] you make a home where that life becomes possible.”

There are bright spots—he visits Beacon Hill Village, a Boston program that creates neighborhood support for elderly people to stay in their homes. At NewBridge, also near Boston, residents have private rooms and come and go as they like; the facility shares land with an elementary school whose students are buddies and mentees of residents.

More hospitals, often led by palliative care specialists, are facilitating conversations

“We’ve succumbed to a belief that, once you lose your physical independence, a life of worth and freedom is simply not possible.” —Atul Gawande

like the one Gawande wished he’d had with Joseph Lazaroff. In LaCrosse, Wis., medical leaders launched a campaign in 1991 to get clinicians and patients to discuss end-of-life wishes. Over time, this resulted in more clarity for family members and clinicians about what patients really wanted.

Gawande’s thoughtful, compassionate book will benefit readers far beyond the medical profession. He’s honest about the gray areas of aging and dying—all the more reason to talk with our loved ones, though these are likely the most difficult conversations we’ll ever have.

But he also challenges his medical colleagues. Patients need doctors and nurses who will have hard conversations and help prepare them for what’s coming, he writes, but also to ask, “If time becomes short, what is most important to you?”

And then listen to the answer. ■

Molly Marsh is managing editor at Partners In Health, an organization that works to provide health care to poor populations around the world.

Reviewed by Ryan Herring

RECLAIMING THE PROPHETIC EDGE

***The Radical King*, by Martin Luther King Jr.; edited and introduced by Cornel West. Beacon Press.**

“WE ARE AT the moment when our lives must be placed on the line if our nation is to survive its own folly.”

Martin Luther King Jr. gave this stinging critique of the apathetic nature of both the U.S. church and the general public more than 40 years ago. While some things have changed for the better, the truth remains that the three evils of society that King named (racism, militarism, materialism) continue to pervade U.S. culture, crippling our moral and ethical foundation.

It is difficult to imagine that someone the FBI once labeled as “the most dangerous man in America” would one day have his own national holiday. Each year we celebrate the life of King with an incomplete and romanticized retelling of the impact he had on society during and after the civil rights movement. He dreamed of a better nation, but what was it about his dream that made him a nightmare to the U.S. government?

That is essentially the question that Cornel West attempts to answer with his latest book, *The Radical King*. This is the 10th book in the King Legacy series, a partnership between the estate of Martin Luther King Jr. and Beacon Press. West curated 23 selections, ranging from King’s Palm Sunday sermon on Mohandas K. Gandhi to his speech titled “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence,” which he delivered exactly one year to the day before he was assassinated. West utilizes this wide array of King’s most important writings and orations to illustrate just how radical he was.

According to West, “The radical King was a warrior for peace on the domestic and global battlefields. He was a staunch anti-colonial and anti-imperial thinker and fighter. His revolutionary commitment to nonviolent resistance in America and abroad tried to put a brake on the escalating militarism running amok across the globe. As a decade-long victim of the vicious and

vindictive FBI, King was a radical libertarian as well as having closeted democratic socialist leanings. His commitment to the precious rights and liberties for all was profound.”

Many Christians like to concentrate on King’s commitment to peace and nonviolent protest. This focus can lead to the meek and docile version of King that is sometimes presented in the public sphere. It is eerily similar to the treatment we give Jesus. King’s commitment to radical love came

out of his radical commitment to the gospel and out of his radical commitment to imitate Christ. This commitment is what allowed King to be unapologetic in his prophetic criticism of U.S. society.

Throughout *The Radical King* we are given examples of the depth to which King loved. In a sermon King reminds the congregation that when he

speaks of love he is not “referring to some sentimental or affectionate emotion. It would be nonsense to urge [people] to love their oppressors in an affectionate sense. Love in this connection means understanding, redemptive goodwill.” King continues, “we speak of a love which is expressed in the Greek word *agape*. ... *Agape* is not a weak, passive love. It is love in action. *Agape* is love seeking to preserve and create community. ... When I am commanded to love, I am commanded to restore community, to resist injustice, and to meet the needs of my brothers [and sisters].” The type of radical love that King embodied emboldened him to go head to head with the greatest empire this world has ever seen.

Since Michael Brown was killed by police officer Darren Wilson on Aug. 9, 2014, there have been more than 900 demonstrations nationwide in protest of police brutality and racist law enforcement departments. The release of *The Radical King* in the midst of mass protest is timely. This is precisely the King whose words can be the sustenance for today’s movement. One must wonder,



however, as West wonders, “Does America have the capacity to hear and heed the radical King or must America sanitize King in order to evade and avoid his challenge?” ■

Ryan Herring is founder and editor-in-chief of The Ghetto Monk. For the past several months he has been organizing against police brutality in Louisville, Ky.

Reviewed by C. Christopher Smith

MAKING JESUS A PATRIOT

***One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America,* by Kevin Kruse. Basic Books.**

IN A RECENT interview, Wendell Berry reiterated how perplexed he was that many Christians who are guided by a deep love for God can participate so willingly in an economy that is rapidly devastating God’s creation. In his new book *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*, Princeton historian Kevin Kruse offers a narrative that sheds light on how our churches got into the mess that Berry bemoans. As the book’s subtitle indicates, the primary story that Kruse traces is that of the genesis of “Christian America,” which unfolded not in the era of the Founding Fathers, as David Barton and other conservative Christians contend, but rather in the mid-20th century with industrialists who rallied churches to oppose FDR’s New Deal.

Kruse’s story began in the 1930s with the decision of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) to invest in “spreading the gospel of free enterprise” and its alliance with an organization called Spiritual Mobilization, which carried NAM’s message of libertarian politics and free enterprise to churches across the United States. These efforts to promote the synergy of Christian faith and big business picked up steam in the 1940s and blossomed in the 1950s, finding an ally in the White House in Dwight Eisenhower. Symbolic of this movement’s successes were the inclusion of the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance (1954) and the adoption of “In God We Trust” as the official motto of the U.S. (1956), both during the Eisenhower presidency.

In the 1950s, the advertising industry also jumped headlong into these efforts to promote the union of faith and free enterprise, promoting churches as hubs of this message and encouraging Americans to attend their local church regularly. Hollywood also heralded this burgeoning civic religion with films such as Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments*, which was promoted through a massive marketing campaign that included installing plaques of the Ten Commandments in prominent public places across the U.S.

The 1950s also saw the rise of Billy Graham’s evangelistic ministry; Kruse’s portrayal of Graham’s collaboration with the promoters of free enterprise is less than flattering. Noting that the typical account of Graham’s rise is tied to anxiety about the Cold War, Kruse documents that while that anxiety did play a role, it is better understood as part of the larger story about the American way of life that was being promoted by NAM, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Graham regularly courted the interests of big business and defended this union. “[Faith] and business,” he once observed in a U.S. Chamber of Commerce publication, “properly blended, can be a happy, wholesome, and even profitable mixture.”

While Kruse’s work in *One Nation Under God* is a thorough and fascinating treatment of a little known thread of U.S. history, it raises a question outside the scope of his research: What was the impact of this history on churches and the ways that we imagine and embody our Christian faith?

The gospel preached in many churches today, as Berry and others have noted, is generally friendly to industry and uncritical of its sins against humanity and the earth. It seems likely that there is a correlation between the history that Kruse offers here and our present state of affairs. Perhaps by taking a hard look at our past, churches will be a little more cautious in our embrace of unfettered free enterprise. ■

C. Christopher Smith is editor of *The Englewood Review of Books* and co-author of *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus*. He is working on a new book tentatively titled *Reading for the Common Good*.

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PLANT WITH PURPOSE

A Recipe for 'Greater Works'

BY THIS TIME in the church calendar, the liturgical highlights feel like they've slowed considerably. The excitement of Easter is gone, not to be replaced by another holy season until Advent. Pastors and parishioners, who all stayed away the week after Easter, hopefully have returned. The holy days seem to have drained away into the season of counting the weeks, depressingly named as "ordinary time."

Ecclesially speaking, however, the holy days are amping up considerably at this point. Easter season hits a crescendo with these latter weeks. The ascension of Christ used to be marked as one of the greatest feast days of the year, up there with Easter, Christmas, and Pentecost. It signifies Christ's rule over all things, hidden now, to be full-blown and publicly obvious to all in God's good time. Christ himself insists that he must go away in order that the Advocate would come and, in John's language, to enable us to do even "greater works" than Jesus ever did. Pentecost is a new outpouring of the triune God to empower the church to do those greater works. There is much here to be celebrated. A crescendo, not a tapering off.

These texts present a reign inaugurated with resurrection in which the poor eat and are satisfied. One built on friendship and common love. It suggests a God who likes getting born enough that God decided to go through the experience and told the rest of us we should go through it all over again. Is that bodily enough for you?



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[MAY 3]

Joined as One

Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

THE STORY OF the Ethiopian eunuch is one of our best. It is situated here in Acts, but it begins a trajectory with momentum into the approaching Pentecost season. It depicts two very different sorts of people. The eunuch is in charge of the court of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He has traveled all the way to Jerusalem to worship in a temple he cannot enter—one who lacks all the necessary male parts cannot enter the assembly of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:1). Philip is an apostle, a Jew, and a Middle Easterner, and he has no access to the sort of money the eunuch does. The eunuch is reading a Bible he cannot understand, hungering for a God he knows only vaguely. By the time Philip explains the subject of Isaiah to him, the eunuch is ready: "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:38). And the two men, one Ethiopian, one Middle Eastern, one poor, one rich, one Gentile, one Jew, dive together, down into the water, for baptism.

What a glimpse of the church! The church isn't just a place that does the sorts of things Jesus does. We don't just admire Jesus,

or even just worship him. We are joined to him, vine to branches. We are organically united, one to another, so that one can no longer be understood without the other. Here is the chief sign of that union—we love. We are commanded to, but we hardly need the command, any more than a leaf needs to be told to belong to its branch. Love flows from the one to the other and back without deliberation.

The result blooms.

[MAY 10]

Equal Friendship

Acts 10:44-48; Psalm 98; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

THERE IS AN odd relationship between faith and baptism in the book of Acts. In Acts 10, the Gentiles believe, speak in tongues, and praise God, so what can the ecclesial authorities do? They have to provide the water. Often in our churches we baptize as

a matter of course, when someone reaches a certain age. (Baptists are not immune to this phenomenon.) What would it mean for our life together to be so rich that others catch the Spirit, contagion-like, and we have no choice but to baptize them too?! No wonder the seas roil and the hills clap their hands (Psalm 98:7-8).

In John 15, we must remember that one of the key philosophical commitments around friendship in the ancient world is that it can only pass between equals. A slave cannot be a friend to a king because of the vast power imbalance between them. We might follow Aristotle's logic in this: Genuine friendship requires a balance of power, the ability to look one another in the eye as equals.

And Jesus calls his disciples "friends" (John 15:15). What this means is that human beings—lowly, mortal, time-bound, and fallible as we are—can be "friends" with God Almighty. This observation has yielded countless cheesy sermons and songs, and yet it stands true. It is an odd sort of friendship, with most of the influence running in one direction! But this friendship is the secret to why the commands given us are not burdensome. They are wisdom offered from one friend to another that makes life more fulsome, more rich, more a source of flourishing.

[MAY 17]

All in All

Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53

SO WHERE DID Jesus go after his resurrection? If it is as bodily as the gospels insist, where is that body now?

The stories from Luke and Acts suggest an answer. Jesus' body *ascends into heaven*. This feels slightly like Christianity at its most mythological. How far up does he go? Where does he land? Is heaven a physical place, that if we could fly high enough we could get to? Why *up* anyway? Artistic renderings of the ascension are always awkward—the bottom of feet, a cloud in the sky—and one wonders whether the actual act would have looked any less awkward.

We can say with greater confidence that

his going up is a reason for rejoicing. All creation sings. He has subdued the peoples and is king over the nations.

The accent in Ephesians is on the wonderfully Pauline word “all.” Christ rules over *all* things, above *all* rule, with *all* under his feet; he is head of *all* things and is the fullness of *all* things who fills *all* in *all*. There is not a single godless molecule in *all* creation.

And that brings us back to our opening question. Theologians through the ages have noticed that the Bible speaks in multiple ways of the body of Christ. The church is that body. So too is the Lord’s Supper. This is a variegated body; there are at least three forms of it. One is inaccessible, ascended. The other two are, well, us, or in us, making us into Christ.

[MAY 24]

Spirit Dreams

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b;
Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

THE HOLY SPIRIT always seems to get short shrift in Christianity. By the time the Spirit comes along, the story is nearly over. Some theologians have tried to turn this into an asset. The Spirit is the “shy” person of the Trinity. The Spirit wants no self-directed attention, but rather always defers attention to Jesus. Some have spoken of the Spirit in feminine terms, exacerbating this issue. Mary Daly, feminist critic of traditional theology, recalls the church’s traditionalist response: “[You women are] included under the Holy Spirit. ‘He’ is feminine.”

These texts suggest an outsized, even exaggerated role for the Spirit. Without the Spirit, all is chaos, unformed, empty. But the Lord sends forth the Spirit and all things are created, and God renews the face of the ground. Jesus says we want him to go away, so the Advocate can come, the Spirit, who leads us into all truth. Before the coming of the Spirit, the disciples are a huddled-up band of betrayers and deniers. With the Spirit they go into all the world, baptizing, teaching, meeting violent deaths. Without the Spirit, all peoples are divided, unrelated. With the Spirit we are one body,

young men and old women dreaming dreams together.

Ezekiel shows the greatest role for the Spirit, turning dry bones into living, skin-on creatures—Israel restored. So the Spirit may be deferential to Jesus, but she is not inconsequential. The Spirit is world-creating, renewing, restoring, making all things new.

[MAY 31]

‘My Name Is Trinity’

Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29; Romans 8:12-17;
John 3:1-17

IN JOHN 3, Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the dark. He asks basic questions. He doesn’t understand Jesus. Do any of us? Are any of us in the light, in the know?

This is a Sunday on which the church grapples with the triune nature of the God of all things. Trinity Sunday is the source of innumerable indecipherable sermons. It is not exactly on the list of parishioners’ faves. A professor of mine used to say the preacher opens a Trinity Sunday sermon apologizing for his ignorance of the subject before spending the next 20 minutes demonstrating that ignorance.

The Trinity is nothing more or less than God. We talk about this in every sermon. The voice, or word, of the Lord is powerful, stripping the forest bare, flashing flames of fire, causing trees to dance, as in Psalm 29. Some ancient Christians saw the two seraphim with the Lord in the temple, as Isaiah describes, as the Holy One and the Spirit (though later we thought this diminished their role and dropped that line of thought). Paul’s word to the Romans is the most important—the Spirit is *in* us, enabling us all to name God “Abba,” the way Jesus does. The Trinity is not “up there,” distant, obscure. The Trinity is in us, under us, working through us to make us daughters and sons of God.

Now the light is coming up and we, like Nicodemus, are starting to see. The Spirit blows where it will, moving strangers like you and me into saints, making all things new. ■

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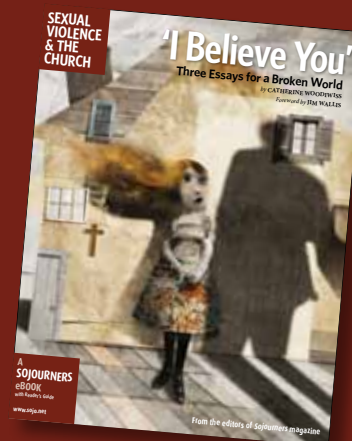
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Pulling Yourself Up by Your Bootstraps...

WITH THE NEXT election still almost 18 months away, you'd think the media would focus on more important topics in the meantime, such as where Kim Kardashian is spending her next vacation.

But you'd be wrong. It's officially time for the press to ignore more newsworthy subjects in favor of endless coverage of the election "horse race," but without the legendary good sense horses bring to such occasions.

ISIS ON THE MOVE, taking the Middle East back to the 7th century? Forget that. Let's talk about Jeb Bush's 2016 run, although the hook could be how ISIS reminds people of the disastrous policies of the last Bush in the White House. Or was it the one before that? I can't remember. (In

... like the Koch brothers, who have really nice bootstraps.

hindsight, the Bush parents should have named *all* their sons George, so presidential ballots could be printed in bulk, enough for several elections.)

Interestingly, the latest news about ISIS is that its recruits from the West are having second thoughts about the medieval living conditions so praised by the jihadists. After all, in the 7th century there were no antibiotics, no running water, and only basic cable. But you won't find the press covering that because "Sarah Palin may be running again!"

Although, to be fair, there is a foreign policy connection, since she has publicly stated "God bless our troops, especially our snipers." (Such a wonderful ambassador for our nation. Definitely U.N. material.)

CLIMATE CHANGE threatening our coastlines? Boring. Cable news



thinks Mike Huckabee's White House prospects are, frankly, a lot more interesting. His new book, *God, Guns, Grits, and Gravy*, is an alliterative attempt to keep his name before the public. Either that, or he was reading from a Cracker Barrel menu. Regardless, he hopes book sales will be better than his last effort, *When Monkeys Fly: My Timeline to the Presidency*.

NEARLY A quarter of American children living in poverty? No time to report on that since there are more Republican presidential hopefuls than there are months left before the election. And the media must profile each one, *ad nauseam* (which is a Latin phrase meaning "If you say that Rick Perry's glasses make him look smarter, I'm gonna throw up").

But here at Sojourners' political desk, we're going to ignore the horse race and save you some time. In our view the election is already over. It's a done deal. The only question is how many votes Hilary Clinton will lose by, rounded up to the nearest \$100 million. Because we don't have one person, one vote any more. It's one person, one very large check.

And much of that money will come from the Koch brothers—Beelzebub and Mephistopheles—two

industrialists pledging almost \$1 billion to stem the tide toward "collectivism," which is the opposite of "pulling yourself up by your bootstraps" (which I think has something to do with choosing good footwear, but that can't be right).

Actually, it means we shouldn't depend on the government to help us. True success only comes when individual Americans work hard and create their own future, just like the Koch brothers, who began their careers with nothing but the clothes on their backs and several million dollars in assets from their father's factories. Donald Trump is another example of a self-made man who started out after college with just a dream, a can-do attitude, and \$40 million in seed money from his dad. And that buys a lot of seeds.

Coincidentally, the Supreme Court has ruled these men can use that money any way they want, like to buy a really big boat, some nice clothes, or maybe a country. Because Americans shouldn't depend on anybody else to help make something of themselves. They should use their inheritances, like normal people. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.



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